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VOLUME 13, 2007

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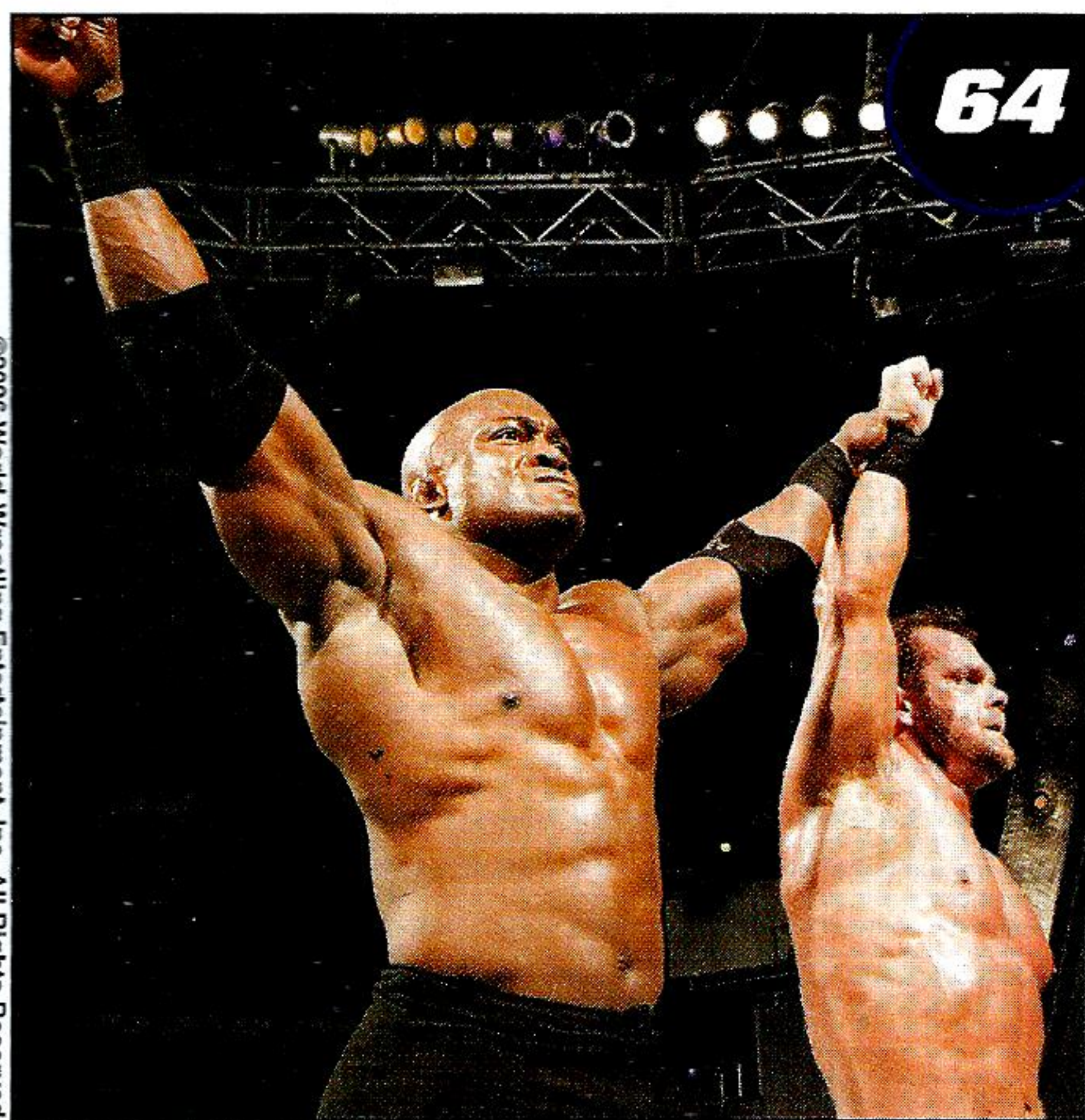


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contents

Volume 13, 2007



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FEATURES

30 Q & A: PAUL ORNDORFF

Despite the current nostalgia craze, 1980s legend Paul Orndorff has kept a low profile ... until now. Orndorff sets the record straight in this 90-minute interview with Editor-in-Chief Harry Burkett. Why did he leave the WWF so abruptly? Who does he blame for the neck injury that derailed his career? What happened in that backstage brawl with Big Van Vader? "Mr. Wonderful" provides the answers.

48 WRESTLING'S EXTREME MTV MAKEOVER

Underground Wrestling Meets Music Television

52 SNORTING MAD!

How A Secret Pact With Christian And Edge Turned Rhino Into A Madman!

56 DEGENERATION X-PLOSION!

Brace Yourself For The HHH vs. HBK Feud!

64 A LASHLEY BACKLASH?

Will His Biggest Win Become His Biggest Regret?

DEPARTMENTS

4 YOUR LETTERS

6 WHAT'S HAPPENING by Brady Hicks

12 NO HOLDS BARRED with Will Welsh

14 BLINDSIDED by Harry Burkett

16 THUMBS UP, THUMBS DOWN

18 POINT/COUNTERPOINT

20 INTRODUCING ... CHARLES EVANS

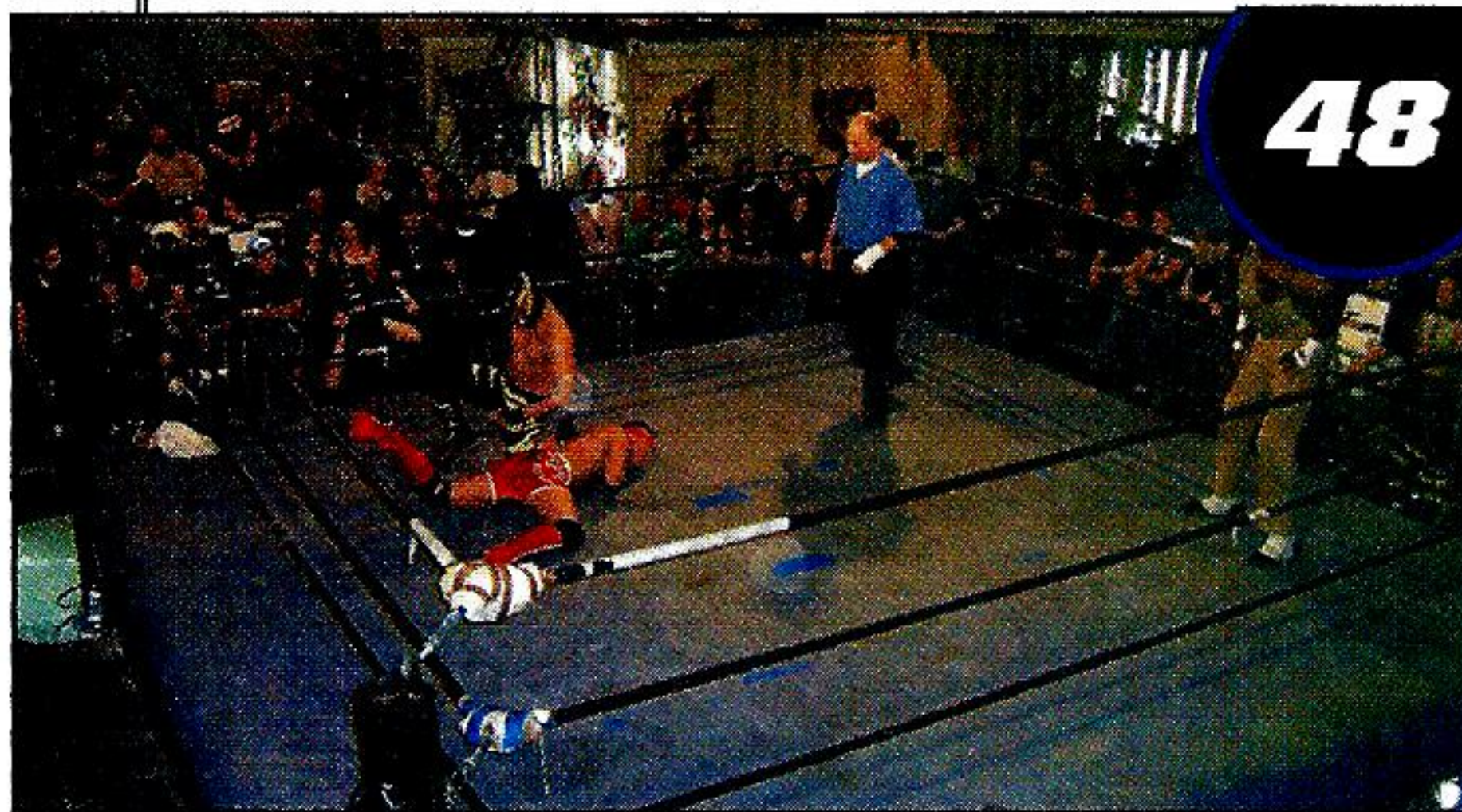
22 FROM BELL TO BELL

by Mike Quackenbush

24 SPOTLIGHT ON ... LITA

72 OFFICIAL WRESTLING RATINGS

74 WOW! REMEMBER HIM?



Look for the Volume 14, 2007 issue of THE WRESTLER/INSIDE WRESTLING on sale March 13, 2007

your letters

NO CREDIBILITY?

Vince McMahon's attempt to "entertain" is a total flop. First, he severely tarnishes the Smackdown World title by allowing Rey Mysterio Jr. to defend the belt against much larger opponents such as Mark Henry and The Great Khali and lose in several non-title matches. Then, what could have been a classic series of pure matches between Mysterio and Chavo Guerrero Jr. was instead turned into a meaningless feud based on the death of Eddie Guerrero, whose memory deserves better.

And what's so impressive about The Big Show defending the ECW title against Ric Flair, who is 57 years old, and Sabu, who's essentially a cruiserweight? Why didn't Vince book The Big Show vs. Khali in what would've been a true battle of the giants?

Then there was the embarrassing "Champion of Champions" match at Cyber Sunday in which King Booker relied on Kevin Federline's interference to retain the Smackdown World title against Raw World champ John Cena and ECW champ Big Show for the title. Why are so many title bouts ending in outside interference?

Due to these kinds of booking decisions, wrestling has been reduced from "entertainment" to a farce!

KURTIS WOLF
Glendale, AZ

GOOD MOVE, KURT

I am glad that Kurt Angle left WWE and went to TNA. Nobody can blame him. I'm sure he misses the competition and the intense scientific matches he had with Chris Benoit and Brock Lesnar. Kurt Angle is in a same league as Bret Hart and Shawn Michaels because he can adapt to any style and his matches

are always better because of it. He knows there are similar wrestlers in TNA—on par with Benoit, Lesnar, Hart, and Michaels—who will make fantastic opponents. I know that any matches he will have against A.J. Styles, Chris Sabin, Christopher Daniels, or Samoa Joe will be jaw-dropping.

When Kurt Angle said he would take on anybody from a four-sided ring, a six-sided ring, or an eight-sided ring, that's when I knew Angle wanted more out of wrestling.

WWE has to realize that old-school and revolutionary styles of wrestling are merging. Keep up with the times. That means no gimmicks and just pure wrestling.

I used to be a WWE fan. Then Kurt Angle left WWE. Now I am a TNA fan. When I see WWE's obscene gimmicks, the only wrestler I like is The Undertaker. The "Dead Man" has been around for years, but even 'Taker knows he has to keep up with the times without changing the character that people love so much. That's why he has incorporated moves from shootfighting into his style. I wouldn't be surprised if he left soon, too. I see WWE going down WCW's path—ignoring the people. What a shame.

BRUCE OSORIO
yinyangdragonx@yahoo.com

LADY KILLER

C'mon guys! Let's have more Randy Orton in your mags! How about a "Wrestling Analyst" of him? A cover story? Even a "Capsule Profile"? Anything on the best pure heel in the business today. The one and only "Legend



World Wrestling Entertainment? Not in the eyes of reader Kurtis Wolf. Perhaps Vince should crack down on the overabundance of disqualifications by outside interference. Ahem ... we think Kurtis is talking about you, Sharmell.

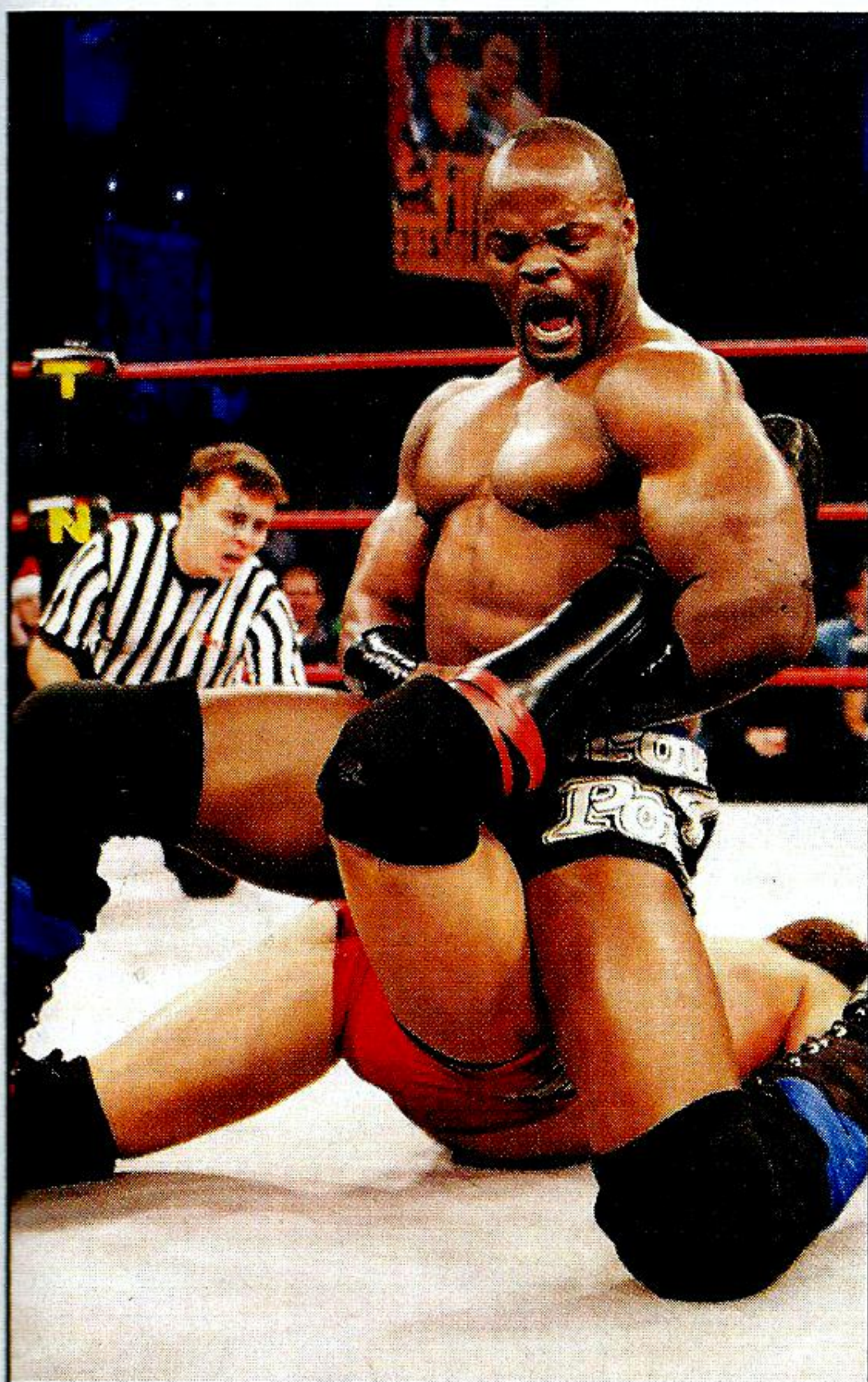
Killer" and the sexiest man on earth: Randy Orton!

BECKY GRAHAM
buffkixas@yahoo.com

NO GO FOR KHALI

The Great Khali was at the top of Smackdown and beating cruiserweights weekly. He feuded with The Undertaker, but eventually lost in a brutal last-man-standing match. Then he made the worst move a wrestler could do! He went to ECW. If he lost a brutal match that could have ended his career, why go to ECW where the wrestling is bloodier and even more brutal? He now has to face ECW veterans such as The Sandman and Rob Van Dam (although he can probably beat both of them in a traditional match). Khali is definitely a hardcore loser.

EDDIE PIROSKO
lowrider_eddieguerrero@hotmail.com



Elix Skipper: a great wrestler and a great person, according to James Hadley. James says Skipper's dedication to his fans proves that TNA remembers that wrestling is about the fans. Perhaps Chris Benoit should pick up a pen and follow "Primetime's" example.

BOBBY ON THE BRAIN

I read your most recent issue, the one with the Bobby "The Brain" Heenan interview ("Q&A: Bobby Heenan," The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling, Volume 11, 2007), and I had no idea he was in such bad shape from cancer. I certainly have memories of him from my childhood, most notably the time when he insulted Big Bossman's mama and was handcuffed to the railing in front of 30,000 spitting fans. That's my most vivid WWF memory.

MICHAEL ADAMS
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SMACKDOWN STOLE THE SHOW

I thought the Survivor Series was the best PPV so far this year. It was great that Batista won back the Smackdown World title. Also, Mr. Kennedy overcame a huge obstacle to beat The Undertaker in their first-

blood match, which truly should push him to a main-event spot on the real "A" show, Smackdown. John Bradshaw Layfield was right when he said that Smackdown stole Survivor Series.

I was a bit puzzled by the booking of the card, though. Mike Knox and Montel Vontavious Porter do have skills, but I don't think that they deserved spots at one of WWE's premier pay-per-views. Guys such as Carlito, Shelton Benjamin, Paul London, and Brian Kendrick deserved to be there, but were ignored. Also, what kind of moronic referee would count out Ron Simmons? Damn!

MIKE ANDERSON
Auckland, New Zealand

HOORAY FOR TNA!

I am a big TNA fan because TNA promotes professional wrestling, not sports entertainment. These athletes are amazingly talented. And now that

Kurt Angle is on the roster, TNA is no doubt the number-one promotion in the business.

Here's an example of the difference between TNA and WWE. I wrote a letter to Chris Benoit (one of my favorite wrestlers), and he never wrote back. I wrote to another one of my favorite wrestlers, Elix Skipper, and he sent me an autograph.

As a TNA fan, I feel like I'm part of movement that's on the rise. I'll be the first to get the TNA video game when it comes out.

JAMES HADLEY
Benton Harbor, MI

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what's happening?

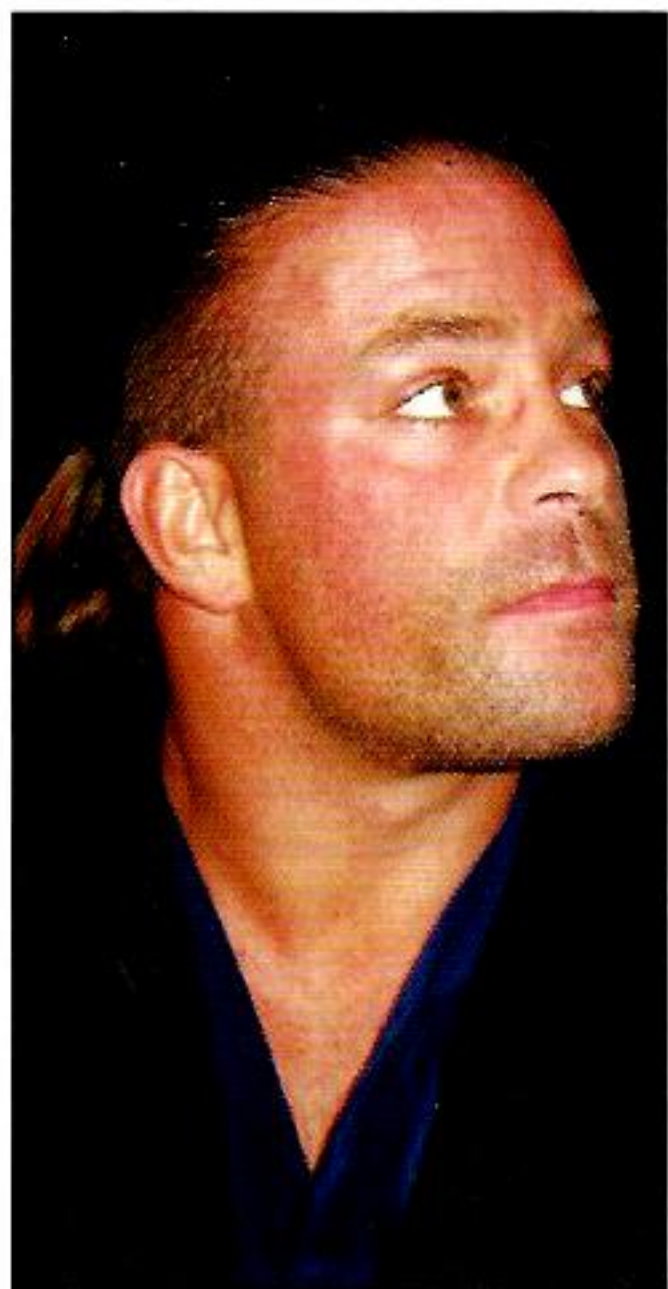
By Brady Hicks

THERE IS A shakeup in the works for the WWE-owned ECW. For the first time, **Paul Heyman** is not in any way associated with the brand. The decision came in the aftermath of the December to Dismember pay-per-view in Augusta, Georgia, following a heated argument between **Vince McMahon** and Heyman in a closed-door meeting. While nothing is confirmed or denied, there are rumors that the argument pertained to the overall direction of the brand and what

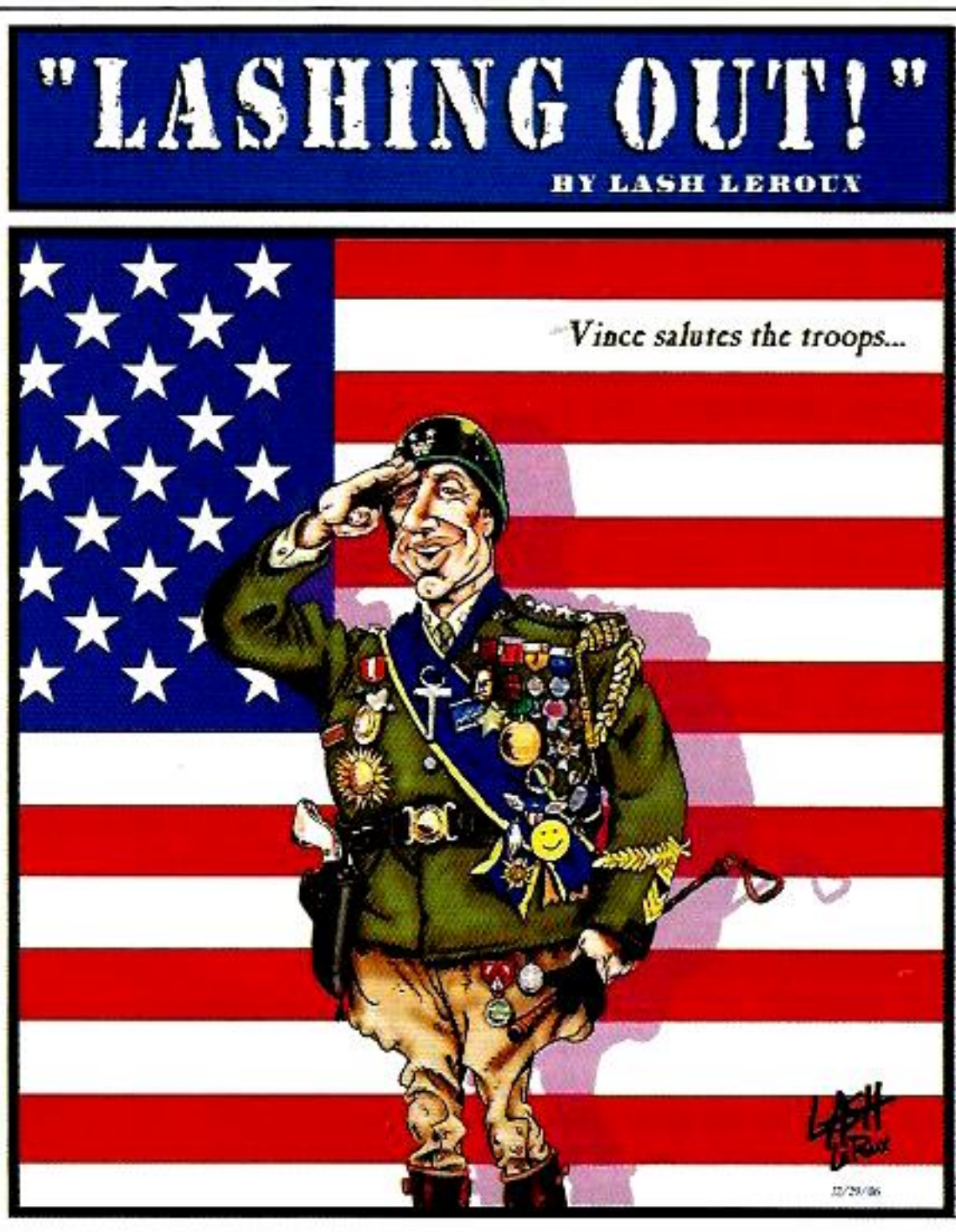
the future would hold for Heyman's darling, **Rob Van Dam**. While Heyman believes that McMahon is hurting ECW by its failure to promote Van Dam and other ECW Originals, it is believed McMahon is decidedly against allowing the former "Mr. Monday Night" to excel again following his drug possession arrest this past summer.

Meanwhile, it was widely reported on the Internet that Van Dam's own wife—in attendance during December to Dismember—

was among the fans loudly proclaiming support for TNA. This rumor has fueled speculation that Van Dam has remained in touch with **Kurt Angle** and is strongly considering a jump when his contract expires in 2007. Meanwhile, Van Dam's running buddy, **Sabu**, has also seemingly been in trouble with WWE management for several weeks, adding to the rumors that Sabu is looking to be released from his contract so that he can join his friend and return to TNA. This was evident when Sabu



The wrestling world is waiting in anticipation to see what will happen when Rob Van Dam's WWE contract expires in 2007. Will he make the increasingly popular jump to TNA and join WWE alums Christian Cage and Kurt Angle?





full hype mode for this nostalgic match, it did recently bring back two of the more popular tag teams to compete for the company in the past few years. First, a reunion was established between **The Hardys**, who competed as members of **DeGeneration X's** Survivor Series team. Given the reaction the team received, it seemed natural to keep Smackdown's **Matt Hardy** and Raw's **Jeff Hardy** together for appearances on all three of WWE's brands. They also issued an open challenge to any team for the ECW December to Dismember show. A soon-to-be reunited **M-N-M** answered the challenge, but **Johnny Nitro** and the newly returned **Joey Mercury** lost to The Hardys at

the pay-per-view. Despite the positive reaction from the crowd at December to Dismember—as well as

The scowl on The Big Show's mug has recently changed from one of intimidation to one of exhaustion. The behemoth will take some time to rest his accumulating aches and ailments before his much-rumored appearance at **WrestleMania 23**—a match that could be his last.

was attacked and removed from the "Elimination Chamber" match at December to Dismember.

While it is believed that the two ECW Originals are looking for a fresh start with WWE's competition, another man who has come to be associated with ECW is now considering retirement. **The Big Show**, who dropped his ECW title to **Bobby Lashley** and lost a subsequent rematch, will be taking off for the remainder of his WWE contract (which expires in February 2007) to heal up and prepare for a possible final match against **Hulk Hogan** at **WrestleMania 23**. This match will be to commemorate the 20-year anniversary of Hogan's defeat of **Andre the Giant** at **WrestleMania III**, also in the Detroit area.

While WWE has yet to go into

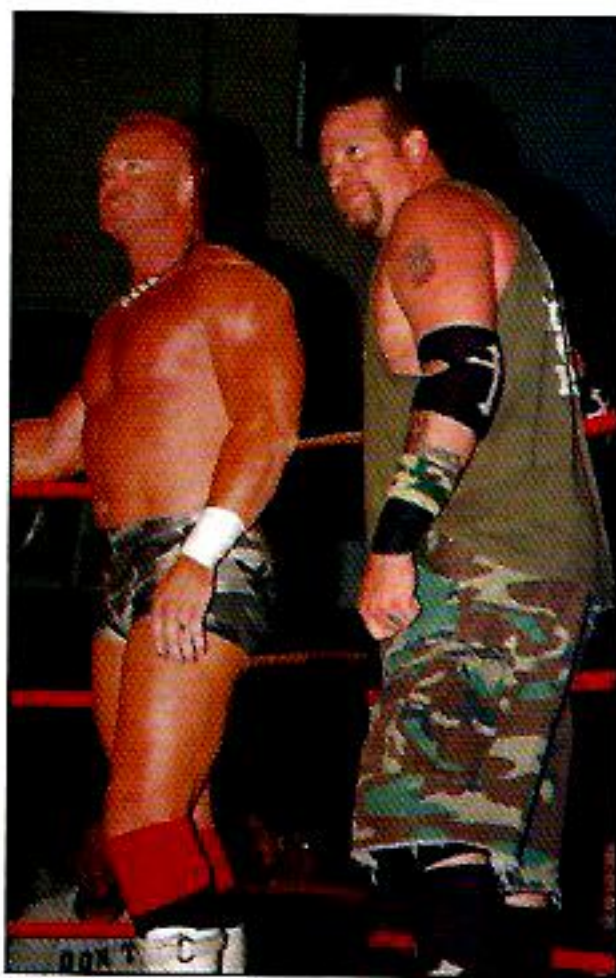
Armageddon, where the two teams were added to a Smackdown tag team title ladder match—no decision has been announced as to the future of either team.

While M-N-M was the only team WWE acknowledged as answering The Hardys' open challenge, **tnawrestling.com** was quick to report that **B.G. James** and **Kip James**—now collectively known as **The Voodoo Kin Mafia** (formerly known as **The James Gang** in TNA and **The New Age Outlaws** in WWE)—would accept the match at December to Dismember if WWE would allow them to compete. VKM's statement was the latest in an ongoing angle in which they have been criticizing what they label as "Dumb To The Extreme" vignettes. Also part of the angle,

VKM taped a series of segments from location at WWE headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut. To date, the team has not been able to re-create the magic of the DX invasion of WCW, of which they were a part in 1998.

On November 27, 2006, **wwe.com** reported that **Roddy Piper** had been diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma, a form of cancer. As of press time, Piper was undergoing radiation therapy to fight the disease. In an ironic way, a brief return to wrestling could have saved Piper's life, as the former Raw World tag team champion was pulled from Survivor Series just before the event due to what were thought to be kidney stones. He was later diagnosed with cancer. Our thoughts and well wishes go out to Piper and his family at this difficult time.

A new brand of wrestling is nearly set to hit the airwaves. **Wrestling Society X**—an ongoing project by MTV—will begin airing on the network on January 30,



Kip and B.G. James, now going by the name **Voodoo Kin Mafia**, have set their sights on Vince McMahon and WWE, issuing open challenges to the number-one promotion—although everyone knows no cross-promotional match will take place anytime soon.

DON'T MISS

PWI UPDATE WITH FRANK INGIOSI

EXCLUSIVELY ON:
pwi-online.com

Pro Wrestling Illustrated Managing Editor Frank Ingiosi, is insightful, provocative, and downright funny! You've read "The Trade's Mark" in *PWI*. Now check out Frank's column, "The Turn," every Friday afternoon.

Ingiosi On Undertaker vs. Henry: "The Undertaker looked great, hitting spot after spot and manhandling Henry as if he were a sack of potatoes (which, ironically, will rank three spots higher than Henry in this year's *PWI* 500.)"

Ingiosi On Joey Styles' Promo: "Nothing was sacred, as Styles attacked some of the company's ridiculous storylines, as well as the chairman himself. Basically, for one beautiful three-minute span, Styles was the voice of every disgruntled fan."

Ingiosi On WWE Women: "I hope something relatively interesting happens soon, because I'm actually getting tired of this weekly, mind-numbingly repetitive catfight between Mickie James, Ashley, and Trish. It's actually gotten to the point where it bores me both as a wrestling fan and as a man. Did I just write that?"

**Frank Ingiosi ...
on pwi-online.com!**

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2007, at 10:30 p.m. Eastern time (see story on page 48). While this doesn't exactly re-create the Monday Night War, many in the industry think it will spark some competition against ECW's weekly program, the second half of which will air directly against it. Company backers hope the show will garner enough attention to land a permanent spot with MTV.

Hopping networks to CBS, former WWE women's champion **Trish Stratus** is set to begin appearing on television again, only this time she will be policing the streets of Muncie, Indiana, instead of appearing in a Raw ring. Stratus joins a cast that includes actor **Erik Estrada**, **Jack Osbourne** of *The Osbournes* fame, **Jason "Wee-Man" Acuna** from *Jackass*, and singer **La Toya Jackson**. Each celebrity has undergone exten-

sive training as a rookie police officer, and will begin patrolling the streets of the small town beginning January 10, 2007.

Finally, WWE recently held meetings with the Pride mixed martial arts group and New Japan Pro Wrestling, both of which related to potential business opportunities between the companies. Rumors persist that WWE is interested in launching its own MMA brand, although talks have diminished since it was unable to sign MMA competitor **Bob Sapp** to a deal. **Shane McMahon**, reportedly a strong proponent of the idea, would head the division. Meanwhile, WWE executives—specifically **John "Ace" Laurinaitis**—met with NJPW President **Simon Inoki**, also about future joint business opportunities. Stay tuned for news on both stories as they develop. □



After extensive training for in-ring combat, Trish Stratus (shown here against Tracy Brooks) is now doing more training, only this time, instead of commanding the ring, she'll be policing the mean streets of Muncie, Indiana, alongside Jack Osbourne, *CHiPs*' Erik Estrada, "Wee-Man," and La Toya Jackson.

no holds barred

With Will Welsh

I'VE BEEN A fan of professional wrestling my entire life. I grew up watching *WWF Superstars* and the NWA's *World Championship Wrestling* on WTBS. Some of my childhood idols included Ric Flair, The Road Warriors, and Magnum T.A. When I got a little older, my buddies and I would hop on the train and go to shows at the Philadelphia Spectrum (WWF) and the old Philadelphia Convention Center (NWA). I bought any number of action figures, and my friends and I would book our own supercards and have them battle inside the officially sanctioned WWF toy ring.

Once or twice a week, I also found myself at the local drugstore, leafing through the latest issues of *THE WRESTLER*, *Inside Wrestling*, and *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*. I'd cop a squat in front of the magazine rack, and, right there in the store, I'd get lost within the pages. I'd read each column and story, stare in horror at every bloody photograph, and wonder how in the heck the editors of the magazine could have gotten the ratings so horribly wrong.

Little did I know that 20 or so years later, I'd be sitting in the offices of London Publishing as one of its associate editors helping to compile those very same ratings.

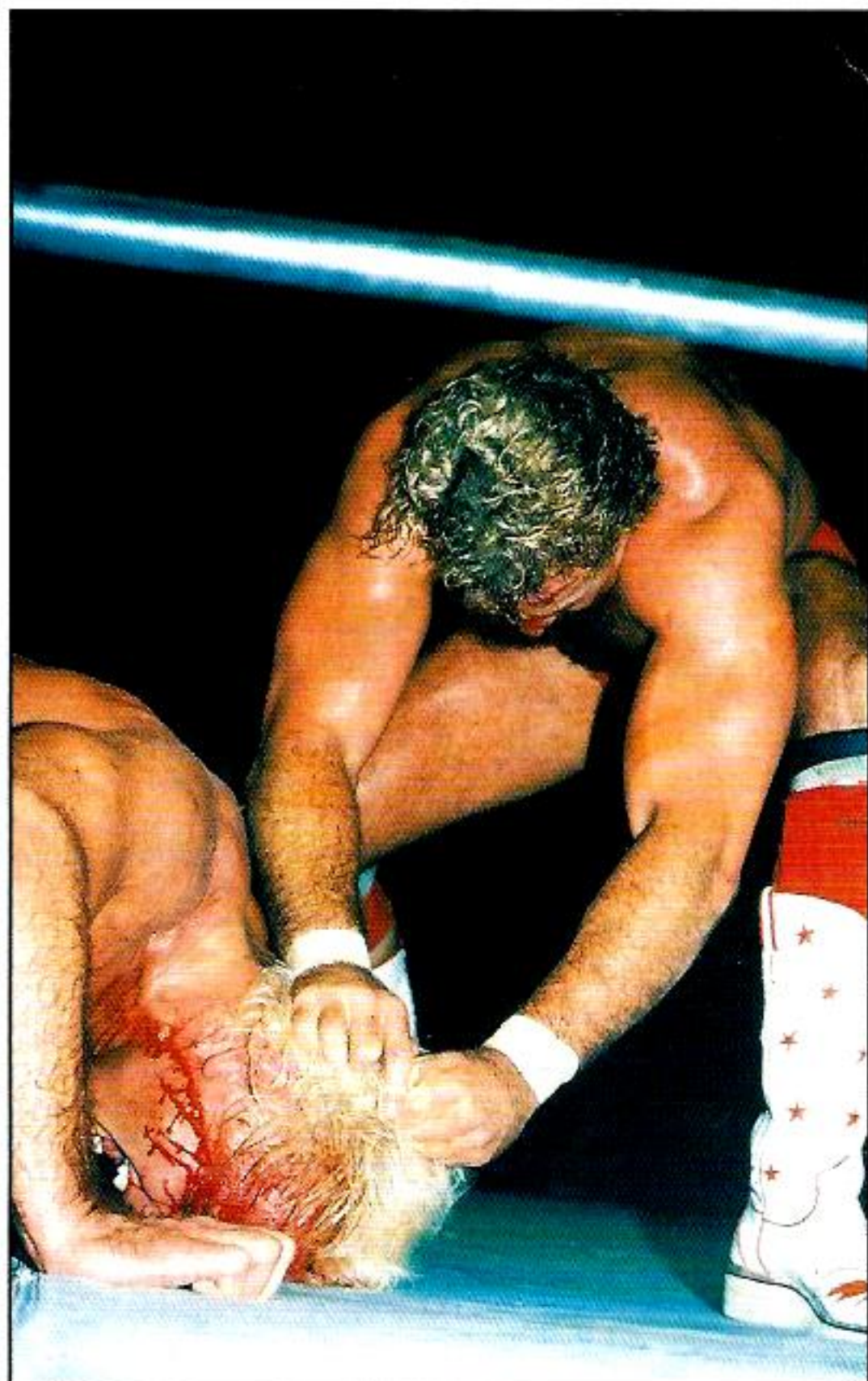
I'm sad to say that this is my last column for this family of magazines. Life is taking me in new directions and giving me new challenges, and those directions and challenges have been preventing me from doing the best job I can—and that's simply not fair to the editors, writers and, most specifically, the readers of these magazines.

Wrestling is far from the easiest sport to cover—and it's even harder when you are distracted, as I have been. There are many roadblocks that attempt to keep us from doing our job properly, and one of the most troublesome is the chameleon-like nature of the business. Just when you think you have the sport figured out, it changes and adapts to better fit the times.

Professional wrestling has always been an ever-changing amalgam of entertainment and athletics, but, today, with the sport vying for attention on so many different media venues (most specifically, broadcast TV, cable TV, pay-per-view, and the Internet) and attempting to compete with everything from reality TV to the

Ultimate Fighting Championship, it's harder than ever to differentiate the athleticism from the entertainment.

Yet, that's the job the writers and editors of these magazines perform with each new issue London Publishing produces. They balance the amalgam that is professional wrestling as best they can—and they do a damn fine job of it, too.



Ric Flair and Magnum T.A. were two of Will Welsh's idols while growing up as a fan in Philadelphia. Imagine Welsh's delight when he was given the opportunity as an adult to see Flair's bloody mop up close and personal.

To be quite honest with you, I don't think there's a better, more entertaining way to cover the sport. Yes, we have had our critics, but we've also sustained. We've pushed forward. We've adapted to the times more than once, and we have outlasted competition that was glossier and better funded.

And let me also tell you this: There is no group of people that works harder to bring you a quality product. The amount of effort that goes into producing each and every issue of *THE WRESTLER*, *Inside Wrestling*, and *PWI* is astounding, and I am extraordinarily proud to have worked with everyone in-house and on staff. Through the years, I've made some very good friends working for these magazines and I owe many people my thanks.

Thanks to Bill Apter, who answered and then dealt with a young college student's instant message asking about a possible internship with the company. I didn't know Bill for very long, as he left shortly after I started my internship, but he was always incredibly gracious and willing to offer advice whenever I asked for it. When he left, I missed his presence around the office. But if he hadn't left, I might not have been given the opportunity to join the company as an employee. It still feels surreal to say that I followed him as *PWI*'s "Ringside" columnist.

Thanks to Stu Saks, who took a chance on an unproven Internet fanboy by hiring him as an associate editor. Stu hired me before I had even completed my degree, so for two semesters I worked full-time in the office and took night classes before graduating with my bachelor's degree. It was a bit stressful at times, but it was also well worth it. I'll forever be grateful to him for giving me my break.

Thanks to Dave Lenker, who is one of the best editors and friends I'll ever have. I wish *Rink*, London Publishing's now-defunct hockey magazine, had made it a little longer. Perhaps I could've cajoled our way into a few more Flyers games.

Thanks to Frank Krewda, who was the toughest editor I've ever known. In fact, I'm pretty sure he'll always hold that position. Frank knew that I had lucked into my job at London, and he made me prove that I deserved it. I wouldn't be half the writer I am today if not for his constant critiquing of my work during our years together.



Hulk Hogan chops away at Avalanche at SummerSlam 1990, which was held in front of a sell-out crowd of 19,304 fans (including Welsh) at the Spectrum in Philadelphia. Welsh was lucky to grow up in an area where pro wrestling was thriving.

Thanks to Brandi Mankiewicz, who took me under her wing, introduced me to many different people, and taught me how to act whenever backstage. Despite "Red's" tough exterior, she's all heart. (Just don't tell her that I wrote that.) She's also quite fun to hang out with at malls on Friday nights.

Thanks to Frank Vitucci, a former photographer for London Publishing who is now working up in Stamford for WWE. Frank let me pal around with him more often than necessary, and, like Brandi, he also taught me a lot about professionalism and how to conduct myself backstage. We definitely had some good times.

Thanks to Dan Murphy, who let me take continual shots at him in my columns and in *PWI*'s annual "Year In Review" photograph section. Here's hoping he had as much fun reading my jokes about him as I had writing them.

Most of all, thanks to you, the wrestling fan. Without you and your support of *THE WRESTLER*, *Inside Wrestling*, and *PWI*, I wouldn't have ever had the opportunity to write for magazines that I grew up reading, and, for that, I owe you all my gratitude.

I clearly wouldn't be who I am today without my tenure at London Publishing, and I wouldn't change who I am for the world.

Enjoy your wanderings. Who knows, maybe I'll see you at the matches. □

blindsided

By Harry Burkett

FROM WHAT I understand, Paul Heyman's abrupt departure from WWE isn't part of a storyline. Apparently, Vince McMahon considered December to Dismember to be enough of a mess to summon Heyman to an impromptu meeting two days later. McMahon was frustrated because December to Dismember ended 42 minutes earlier than planned, leaving a lot of expensive pay-per-view time and countless fans angry because they hadn't got their money's worth.

In addition, McMahon believed that Heyman had changed booking plans after already getting final approval from WWE, meaning that the final product was different from what McMahon was expecting. The December to Dismember disaster (as it's being called by some within WWE) was indicative of McMahon's ongoing disappointment with ECW since its re-launch in June.

Clearly, all is not lost. ECW isn't losing that much money, unlike today's TNA and yesterday's WCW. And it certainly isn't the debacle epitomized by previous McMahon ventures, such as the Xtreme Football League and the World Bodybuilding Federation.

But is Paul Heyman responsible for ECW's disappointing run? In my opinion, he is not. How could he be? Heyman wasn't handling the money. He wasn't even responsible for the overall concept of ECW within WWE. As far as I can tell, WWE executives—most notably Vince McMahon—set forward some very strict parameters about what Heyman could and could not do on television. And, from the very start, ECW was never intended to be the equal of Raw or Smackdown, just an underground alternative.

McMahon hasn't allowed ECW to be anything more than a glorified version of *Sunday Night Heat*. ECW Originals—such as The Sandman, Mahoney, and Stevie Richards—were featured prominently during the first few weeks, but the focus soon switched to up-and-comers such as C.M. Punk, Mike Knox, Kevin Thorn, and Matt Striker. Then some overlooked veterans—such as Test and Hardcore Holly—were added to the mix.

In those all-important formative months of the ECW re-launch, Rob Van Dam, The Big Show, and Kurt Angle were the only stars who were perceived as genuine main-eventers. WWE hasn't pushed Van Dam since his arrest for marijuana possession in July, Kurt Angle was released in August, and The Big Show—after a dominant reign as ECW champ—announced his retirement in December.



Some people have mistaken Paul Heyman's passion for rage. Harry Burkett suggests that Vince McMahon should have valued Heyman's advice, even if it went against the corporate grain. Then again, Burkett does have some sympathy for McMahon's plight.

Yet WWE did not replace these stars with famous names from Raw or Smackdown. The suits-and-ties expected Heyman to "work his magic" and make ECW a money-making brand. After all, Heyman lifted ECW out of obscurity in the mid-1990s and was the only promoter to ever take a true independent promotion and gain a national cable contract. That success was due, almost solely, to his strong booking skills. When Jim Cornette was relieved of his booking duties in Ohio Valley a couple of years ago, Heyman took over storylines and—arguably—made them better than ever.

On December 12, Heyman reportedly asked for his release and McMahon complied—and all of this occurred presumably because of Heyman's bad booking. Like Cornette, Heyman was considered temperamental in WWE, a man whose outspokenness often clashed with the corporate hierarchy. And, as with Cornette, WWE has no tolerance for outspokenness when that person isn't producing money-making ideas.

Then again, it's hard to say what really took place in that December 12 meeting. According to sources, McMahon's criticism of Heyman's recent booking led to a heated argument between the two. It was a scene reminiscent of a few years ago, when Heyman was the head of Smackdown's creative team. Heyman had many good booking ideas, which led to Smackdown getting much better reviews than Raw at the time, but his personality clashes with Stephanie McMahon led to his ouster, both as a member of Creative and eventually as the on-air general manager of Smackdown. So, there is a possibility that McMahon didn't intend to fire Heyman—and that Heyman's own big mouth sealed his fate.

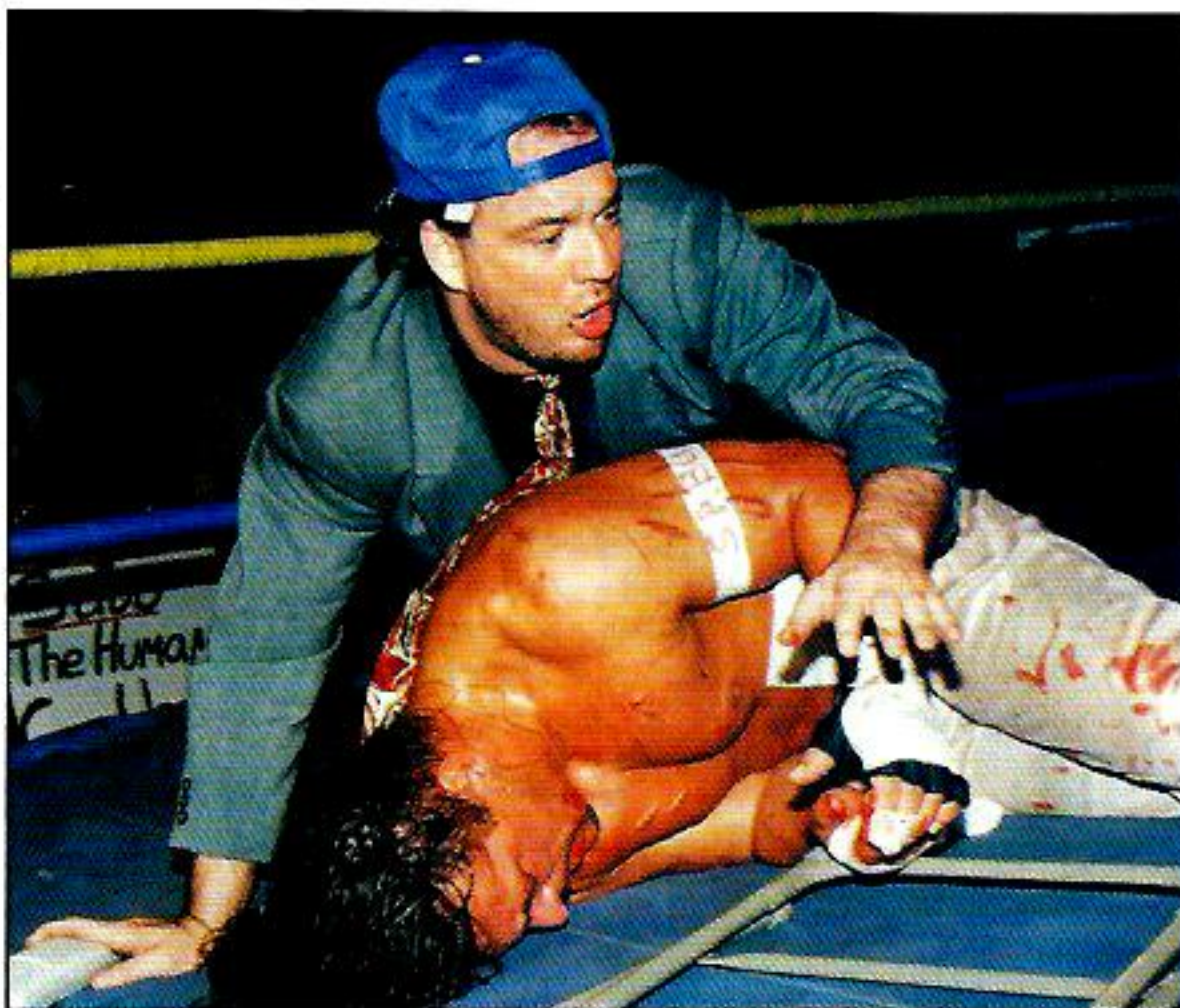
Am I suggesting that the McMahons should tolerate Heyman's outbursts? No, not necessarily. Even Heyman's friends admit that he can be difficult. He will yell, scream, and argue when he's trying to get a point across in the face of opposition. And it must have been endlessly frustrating for Heyman to tolerate WWE's higher-ups making crucial decisions about the brand's future when they were ignorant about what made ECW a phenomenon in the first place. Undoubtedly, the problem was that Heyman still felt like the protective father of ECW. To WWE, he was nothing more than a paid babysitter.

Obviously, the McMahons feel they have plenty of other bookers and writers who can do the job without throwing temper tantrums. The McMahons already feel pressure because they have five (sometimes eight) hours of original programming to produce every week, and they'd rather have team players who can work smoothly and cohesively.

I understand that point of view. But it's also important to have passionate people as part of the team. Heyman could have meekly accepted Vince's criticisms, and he could have simply agreed with Stephanie's ideas a couple of years ago. He could have had a hassle-free, financially comfortable career in WWE, and, perhaps one day, share the WWE Hall of Fame with former McMahon limo driver James Dudley.

But that's not Heyman's style. He cared about the product more than the company. Over the past few years, he has clashed with a billionaire and his daughter in order to produce a better wrestling show. The ironic part is that WWE has been better off because of it.

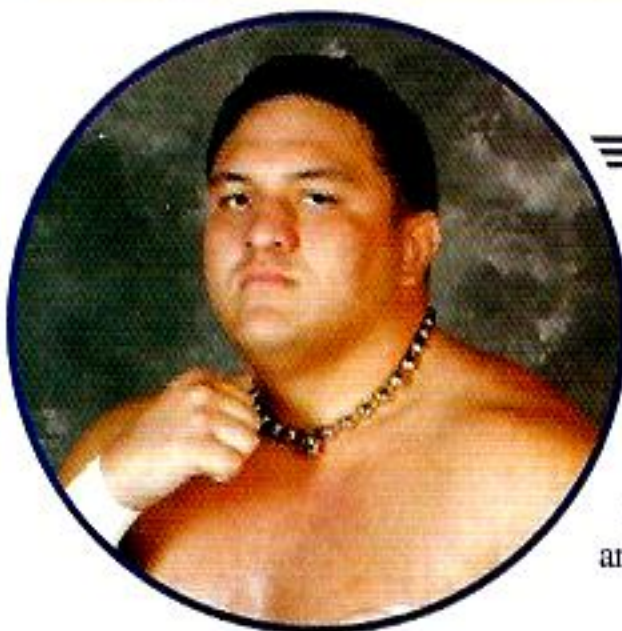
During his plane ride home on the afternoon of December 12, Heyman probably had a few regrets about the way he left WWE. He let his passion get the better of him. But, as Heyman must reassure himself, he would have never reached such high standing in WWE without it.



As the owner of the original ECW, Heyman was as protective of his wrestlers as he was of his company. Although McMahon had his own ideas regarding WWE's third brand, Heyman fought valiantly to retain the spirit of the old ECW in the new ECW. Sabu could probably attest to that.

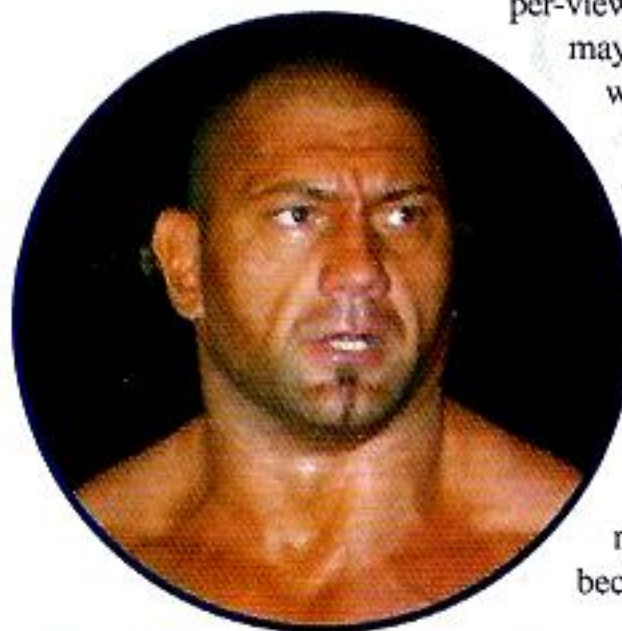
One day before Heyman left WWE, I officially joined the editorial staff of THE WRESTLER and its sister publications as Editor-in-Chief, and Lisa Rocchi was promoted from Associate to Managing Editor. I have enjoyed writing for the London Publishing family of magazines for 10 years, and, after surviving a 90-day trial period here at the office, I am looking forward to reading any comments or suggestions you may have regarding our magazines. Feel free to e-mail any correspondence to wrestlrmag@yahoo.com. And, Stu, I promise, no temperamental outbursts! □

thumbs up



Thumbs Up to Samoa Joe. After suffering the first loss of his TNA career by pinfall or submission at the hands of Kurt Angle, Joe stepped up, accepted his fate, and made no excuses about being bested by the Olympic champion. Admitting that he did indeed tap out to Angle's dreaded anklelock, Joe vowed to gain revenge over TNA's newest star and did just that at the promotion's Turning Point pay-per-view in December. This time, it was Joe forcing his opponent to submit with his vicious kokina clutch. It's rare that both men come out of a feud looking great, but Joe cemented his place among the TNA elite by putting Angle in his place.

Thumbs Up to The Big Show. With rumors circulating that the 7-footer's body was deteriorating to the point that retirement from in-ring competition was nearly certain, Show continued to admirably defend the ECW championship. More impressive, the big man adapted his game more to a hardcore style than many believed possible. It took an "Extreme Elimination Chamber," five other competitors, and Bobby Lashley's history-making performance at ECW's December to Dismember pay-per-view to separate The Big Show from the title. We may not like how he earned it, but Show definitely was a fighting ECW champion during his reign.

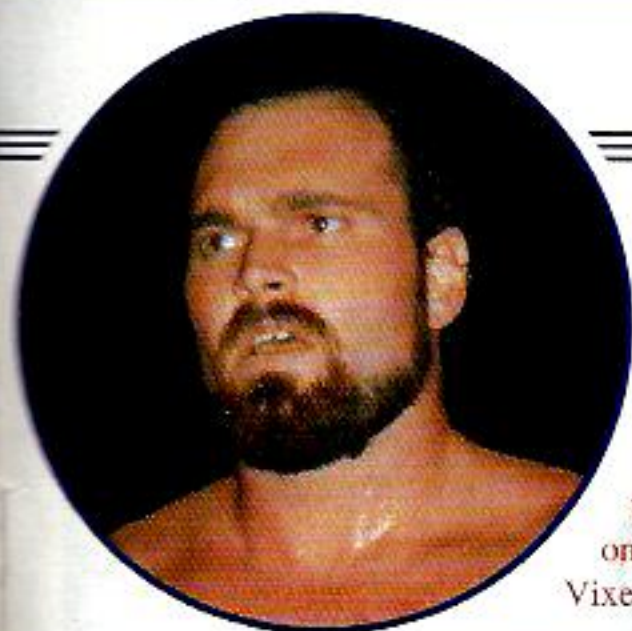


Thumbs Up to Batista. It seemed like only a matter of time before "The Animal" took back his place atop Smackdown, and, at Survivor Series 2006, he rebelled against the blue brand's monarchy to reclaim the World title. Assuming he can avoid injury, Batista could be poised for a long, impressive championship run in 2007. That couldn't come at a better time for Smackdown, which enjoyed high ratings and critical acclaim during Batista's first title reign. King Booker might have ruled Smackdown in his absence, but Batista is quickly becoming wrestling royalty.

Thumbs Up to Lita. Despite Lita's less-than-dignified sendoff, courtesy of both Mickie James and Cryme Tyme at Survivor Series, few can deny the influence the three-time former women's champion had on the industry prior to her retirement. An innovator of high-flying attacks in the women's division, Lita inspired a new generation of female wrestlers. Although injuries shortened her in-ring career, Lita will always be remembered as one of the greats of the new golden era of women's wrestling in WWE. As a fan favorite, Lita was beloved. As a rulebreaker, she was as hated as anyone. Her presence—and disdain of clothes that fully cover her body—will be sorely missed.



thumbs down

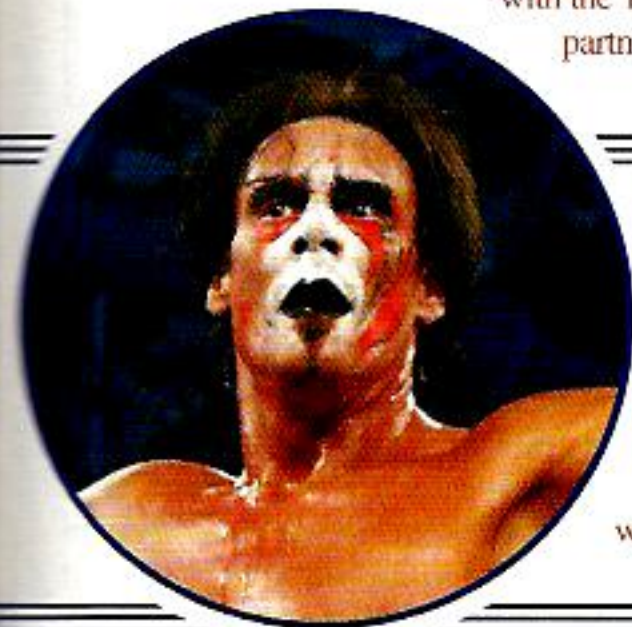


Thumbs Down to Mike Knox. All right, just when our patience with Knox and his ridiculous overprotection of Kelly Kelly finally ran out, he found yet another way to anger ECW fans. Knox took it upon himself to not only abandon the lovely Kelly during the duo's mixed-tag match at December to Dismember, but he then viciously attacked her only two nights later on ECW on the Sci Fi Channel. With one move, Knox went from being the most obnoxious member (our apologies to Matt Striker) of the ECW roster, to the most reviled. Being suspicious of his exhibitionist girlfriend is one thing, but taking out his lack of success on the ECW Vixen is just wrong.

Thumbs Down to Montel Vontavious Porter. The sneaky and sniveling MVP of Smackdown has not only endangered himself, but also Ken Kennedy through his constant goading of the "Brothers of Destruction"—Kane and The Undertaker. In fact, it seems that his cohort, Mr. Kennedy, is getting the worst of the beatings as MVP is oftentimes conspicuously absent when the battle gets serious. What's worse for Porter—Smackdown's most hyped acquisition of recent months—is that it's only a matter of time before Kennedy realizes that he's aligned himself with the Terrell Owens of professional wrestling. With a partner like MVP, who needs enemies?



Thumbs Down to Sting. First, he swore that his sole interest was separating the NWA World championship from Jeff Jarrett's grasp. Then, once he successfully did so, his focus turned to enjoying a long, final run atop TNA. But the usually focused "Stinger" lost his trademark cool—and the NWA World title—to Abyss. What does the enigmatic legend do next? He seeks to befriend the "Man Monster" and become a guiding force in his career, failing to recapture the title in the process. What?! TNA certainly does not need a touchy-feely legend with a soft spot for emotionally fragile behemoths. The last time Sting's motives were this confusing, he was a member of NWO Wolfpac.



Thumbs Down to Eugene. Raw's self-proclaimed "special" competitor had rung in the holiday season by brutally attacking anyone he believed was mocking him. Specifically, Eric Bischoff's nephew pummeled his affable mentor, "Hacksaw" Jim Duggan, on his way to becoming one of the unlikely rulebreakers of the Raw brand. While it's natural for every man to have his breaking point, no one predicted that the loveable Eugene would lose his way in such a raucous manner. Still, it's hard to determine whether this thumbs down should belong to Eugene, or the rest of the Raw roster who has failed to set him straight.



WWE IS WISE TO USE ITS LEGENDS AS ACTIVE WRESTLERS

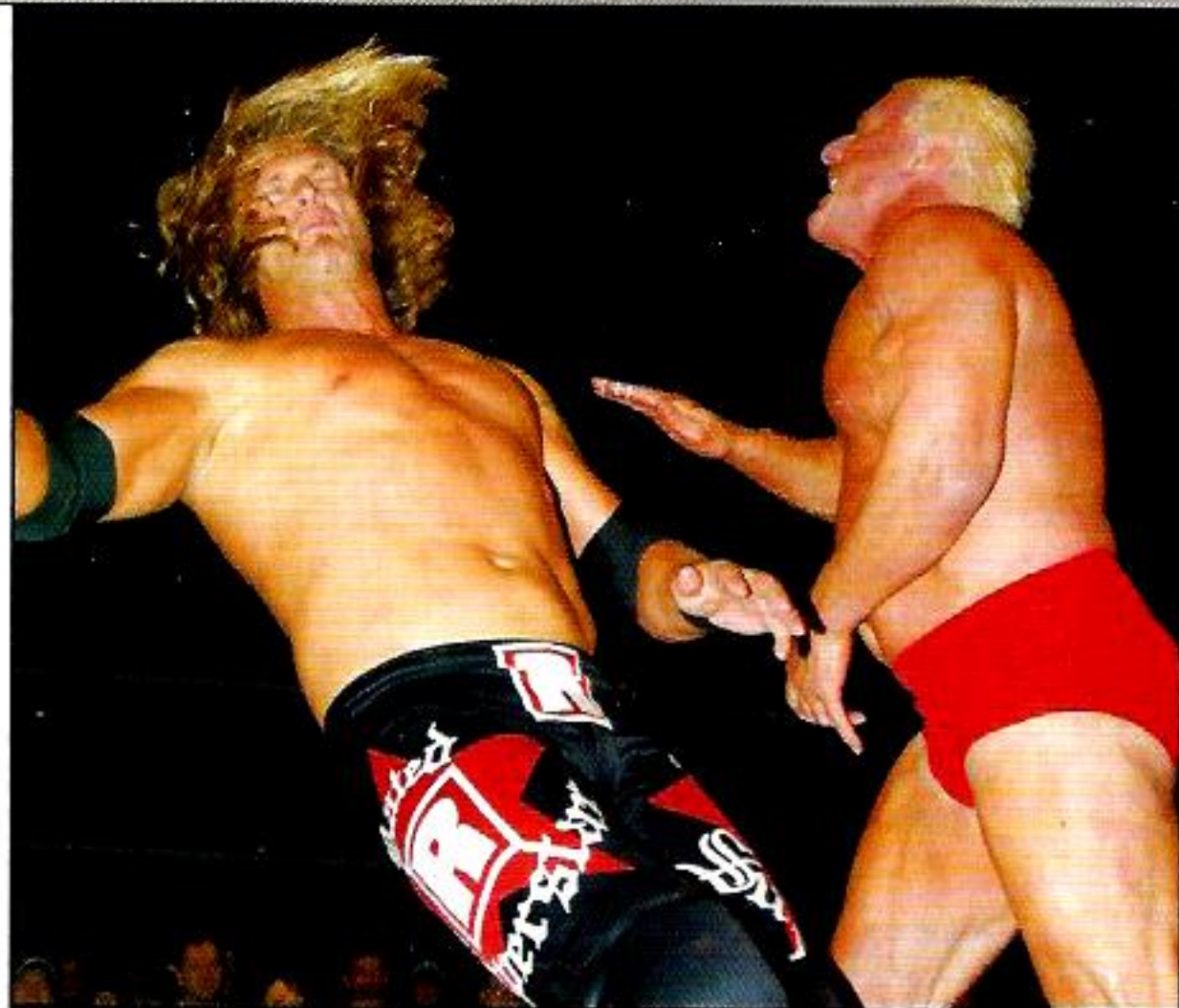
By Liz Hunter

AT SURVIVOR SERIES, we were treated to several old-school Survivor Series elimination matches. As someone who has followed the WWE product for many years, I have always looked forward to these matches at this event. I have such fond memories of the "good ol' days" when teams were made up of cool combinations, leaving only the strong to survive. It's a lot of fun.

This year, WWE upped the ante on the feelings of nostalgia by putting a team of old-timers into a traditional Survivor Series match. These legends—Ric Flair, Sgt. Slaughter, Ron Simmons, and Dusty Rhodes (with Arn Anderson in their corner)—destroyed The Spirit Squad. It was a tribute to their greatness, and fans cheered them not only for their victory, but also for the memories. How fantastic to see Ric Flair and Arn Anderson together again. What an enjoyable wink to the audience that Dusty Rhodes, always an enemy of The Four Horsemen in the NWA, was able to team with the man that helped him carry the territorial banner in the 1970s and '80s.

WWE may be controversial and tawdry at times, but by using these legends, Vince McMahon's company exhibited a lot of class. He respects the heritage of the business after all. Considering that most of the legends he features on his programming made their names in the AWA and NWA, his willingness to pay tribute to them is uncharacteristically noble.

Wrestling fans have long memories. The success of the WWE Hall of Fame and sales of the "Classic



Contributing Writer Liz Hunter thinks there is no better place for the legends of wrestling than where they have spent their entire careers. And with Ric Flair still inciting "Whoos" with a mere chop against today's best young talent, she may have a great point.

Superstar" action figure line clearly show there is a widespread desire for trips down memory lane. The best part of WWE's use of the legends is that memories are no longer moments from the past secured in the vault of our minds. We actually get to relive those memories.

I admit these legends are certainly not at their physical peak. Just looking at them, you can tell that. And maybe it's a little illogical to have them beat up a group of young studs so easily. But that's not the point. Wrestling is primarily about one thing: fan happiness. And I was never happier than when the "Nature Boy" strutted to the ring or when Roddy Piper cracked a coconut over Jimmy Snuka's head.

And to be able to feel those emotions again is wonderful.

2007 marks the 20th anniversary of the "slam heard 'round the world," when Hulk Hogan bodyslammed Andre the Giant at WrestleMania III in Pontiac, Michigan. With WrestleMania 23 returning to Michigan, I am excited to see how WWE marks that historic event. Maybe Hulk Hogan will relive the moment by slamming The Big Show. I hope so. Because I can relive the moment as a fan, paying tribute not only to the legend of Hulk Hogan, but also the late Andre. That's all I ask, WWE. Keep letting me remember, relive, and show respect to the heroes of yesterday. They are the best!

Liz Hunter is a contributing writer for THE WRESTLER.

WWE SHOULD FIND OTHER ROLES FOR ITS LEGENDS

By Jake Black

HOGAN WILL SLAM The Big Show at WrestleMania 23. I have no doubt of that. And it embodies everything that is wrong with how WWE is using its legends these days. Don't get me wrong. I agree that wrestling fans have long memories, and that the use of the legends can pay tribute to the past, but what WWE is currently doing is insulting to our memories and is not a tribute to the legends.

I love nostalgia. I subscribe to WWE 24/7, and look forward to the first of each month to see which memories I can relive. I still feel the chills up and down my spine as Ric Flair and Rick Steamboat go at it. I even love the cheesier memories like Barry Darsow's "Repo Man" skits. But the reason I love them is because they are gone and can't be recaptured. And WWE's attempts to do so are no good.

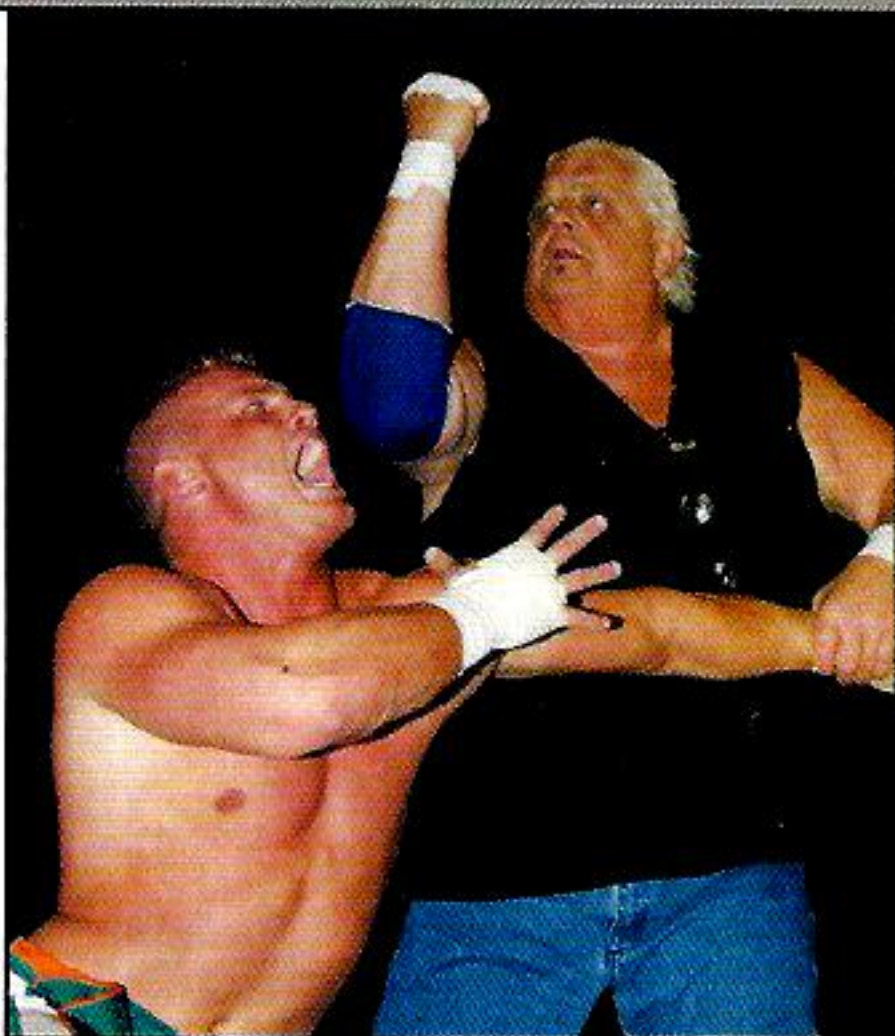
I have to say, I hated to see Ric Flair and Dusty Rhodes team together. And seeing Sgt. Slaughter's ever-growing gut was painful. It's sad for me to see these legends come out to the ring as shells of themselves. They are legends, but they are not immortal. They should be respected, not humiliated.

How, then, should they be respected? I think the best model is Bret Hart. Bret left WWE on horrible terms, and his career ended unceremoniously in the pit of WCW on the end of Goldberg's foot. Yet, in spite of this, Bret's matches and feuds still stand among the all-time greatest. Who will ever forget Bret

holding Steve Austin in the sharp-shooter, as blood cascaded down Austin's face? His strut to the ring with The Hart Foundation is classic WWF. Because he was physically unable to return to the ring, Bret hung up the boots. His DVD retrospective was a bestseller, and his appearance at the 2006 Hall of Fame ceremony let him say goodbye to the fans on his terms. Like the other legends, he was not at his physical peak, but he didn't have to be. Fans

want to remember Hart as the best there is, the best there was, and the best there ever will be. This is because he's not out there erasing the memories fans have of him by creating new ones that are not only different than before, but poor imitations.

I know the wrestling industry doesn't have retirement plans for its athletes and, for many, like Ric Flair, wrestling isn't just a fun gig, but necessary to pay the bills. But there's got to be a better way. The legends have a lot to offer the rising generation of superstars. Pairing them as mentors/managers is one way. Gorilla Monsoon capped his



Contributing Writer Jake Black is not convinced that Dusty Rhodes' arthritic elbow is intimidating anymore. Bringing the legends back to re-create past success isn't only unconvincing, but seeing these men at their worst is also humiliating; they deserve a bit more respect.

legendary career as an on-camera official. When Ric Flair returned to WWE after the closure of WCW, he was a co-owner. It made perfect sense, and it was a great role for him to play. It let him play opposite someone of his own stature, Vince McMahon, and was logical. It also didn't discredit his past achievements by erasing them in the ring. WWE needs to look back at that angle and see how well it worked for Flair. Then find similar roles for other legends. That's the way to pay respect to their contributions to the industry—by building on their legacies.

Jake Black is a contributing writer for THE WRESTLER.

introducing:

By Brady Hicks

CHARLES EVANS

BACK IN THE summer of 2006, the lifelong journey of Charles Evans to that “big-time” contract with WWE took one step closer to fulfillment. In a few short weeks, “The Hammer” (as he is known in Ohio Valley Wrestling) signed a developmental deal with WWE, wrestled his first match on *Heat*, and captured his first of two OVW TV titles by pinning rival Seth Skyfire.

Still, not a lot of information is known about the massive former free agent who was a dominant TV champ for several months. What is known for absolute certainty is that the Bolin Services member is a very angry man. He is a nasty wrestler with few friends in the OVW locker room and a lot of personal grudges. His only real allies, in fact, are ODB and manager Kenny “Starmaker” Bolin.

“You don’t need to know a lot about ‘The Hammer.’ I’ll give you all the information you need,” said Bolin. “Charles ‘The Hammer’ Evans is a monster capable of destroying anything and everything that is put in front of him here in Ohio Valley. I see him being a big force as the next generation of wrestlers begins to make its mark. Once Chuck can refine his craft and focus on winning, you’re going to hear big things from him, I’ll tell you that much.”

Which leads to the question: If Charles Evans is so destructive, why does he need to focus on winning?

One of Evans’ first steps into prominence in OVW was a feud over the TV title with Seth Skyfire back in June, where he overcame interference by Skyfire’s valet, Shelly Martinez, to beat the champion in a non-title match. Immediately after that, Evans was cheated out of victories in subsequent title shots at Skyfire.

Many in the locker room soon began doubting Evans’ ability to win the big one. Sure, he was able to beat Skyfire in a one-on-one match, but—unfortunately for “The Hammer”—losses piled on top of losses when the title was actually on the line. After failing to capture the TV title with several opportunities, Evans seemed to doubt himself. He lost his focus.

That’s when “The King” came to town.

When Raw announcer Jerry Lawler appeared at an OVW event at Six Flags in Louisville, Kentucky, he was immediately targeted by Evans in a brutal and violent—albeit brief—feud. Evans again came out on the losing end, dropping matches on both days of the two-day event. Through defeat, however, Evans learned from the

cagey veteran the need to refine, refocus, and channel his anger toward winning each match, not necessarily demolishing each opponent. Within a few weeks, Evans was featured in a tag team match on *Heat*—a losing effort to “Hacksaw” Jim Duggan and Eugene.

“He’s a very young gun with a lot to learn,” said Lawler. “At times during our matches, I felt like he was trying to go in and overpower the world when all he really had to do was overpower me. Still, you have to recognize that it is still very early in this guy’s career, and he’s already making an impact over there in Ohio Valley. I think he’s going to be very good someday. He just needs to continue channeling his anger toward winning matches instead of beating down the whole world into submission.”

Focus. It is what Evans learned to apply to his post-Lawler matches. It is what helped him hammer his way through his opponents en route to beating Skyfire for the first of his two TV titles. It is what helped him regain that title in his first match back after dropping it to Devin Driscoll. And, by the time masked wrestler “The Mexican Sensation” El Aero Fuego arrived on the scene in OVW, Evans was regularly rolling over every opponent placed in front of him.

That is, until Skyfire outsmarted him again for the TV title.

After dropping his championship to El Aero Fuego late in the year, the mysterious luchador removed his mask to reveal Skyfire himself. Evans—furious over his loss—again lost his composure. It now remains to be seen how Evans will react to the loss of his TV title for the second time. The man has not been seen on OVW programming since the fiasco involving the unmasking of Fuego and the re-crowning of Skyfire as TV champion.

The question that remains is this: When Evans returns to OVW, what will his state of mind be? Will he be a wild, angry monster? Or will he be more laid-back, focused on regaining the TV title for a third time?

“You don’t even need to know where ‘The Hammer’ has been since dropping the title,” concluded Bolin. “What you do need to know is that he will be back, and he will get revenge, just like he always does. In the grand scheme, the future is very bright for Charles Evans. And his star will ultimately outshine that of Seth Skyfire, Devon Driscoll, or any other loser they can drum up to face him.”

That is, if he can stay focused on getting there. □

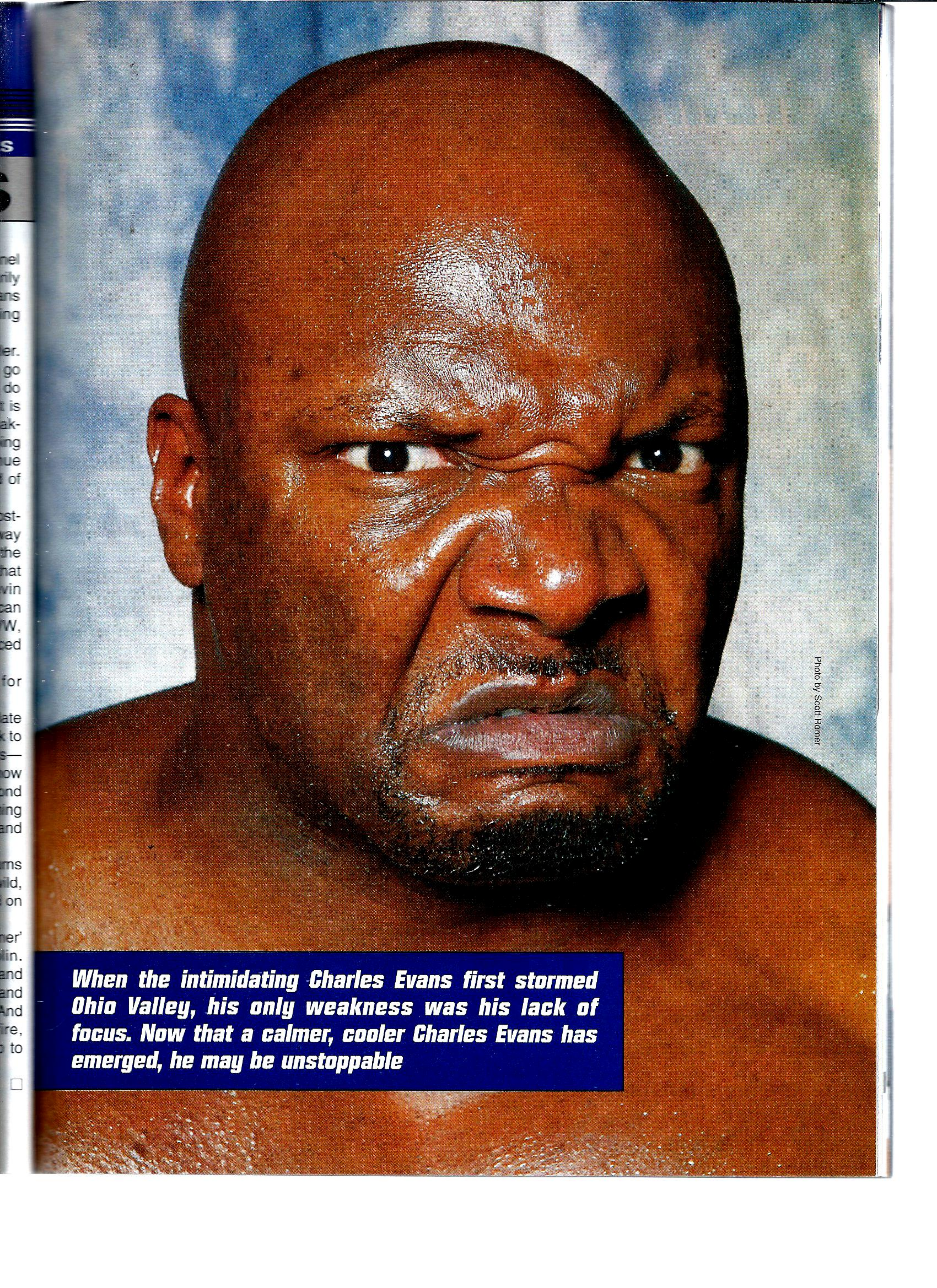


Photo by Scott Romer

When the intimidating Charles Evans first stormed Ohio Valley, his only weakness was his lack of focus. Now that a calmer, cooler Charles Evans has emerged, he may be unstoppable

from bell to bell

By Mike Quackenbush

[Editor's note: Mike Quackenbush, who has held numerous titles in the U.S. and beyond, files reports on the life of an independent wrestler seeking to make an impact on the business. In this issue, he writes about the mixed emotions involved when a protégé gets a call-up to a major promotion.]



DURING MY FIRST tour of Europe, about four years ago, I held training seminars in a few small towns around Switzerland and Germany. I got to meet and teach a number of outstanding European grapplers through these classes, and it was there that I first met Claudio Castagnoli.

The 6'5" Swiss native was a rarity. In other words, he was a natural. He mastered new techniques in virtually no time and had a great sense of

counter-wrestling. Castagnoli has always been a powerhouse, but he never hid his technical acumen behind brute force.

When I returned to the United States at the end of the tour, I compared notes with Chris Hero, who had also helped to train Castagnoli. (As you may know, it was the duo of Hero and Castagnoli that made history in 2006 by simultaneously holding tag team championships in Combat Zone Wrestling, CHIKARA, and Ring of Honor.)

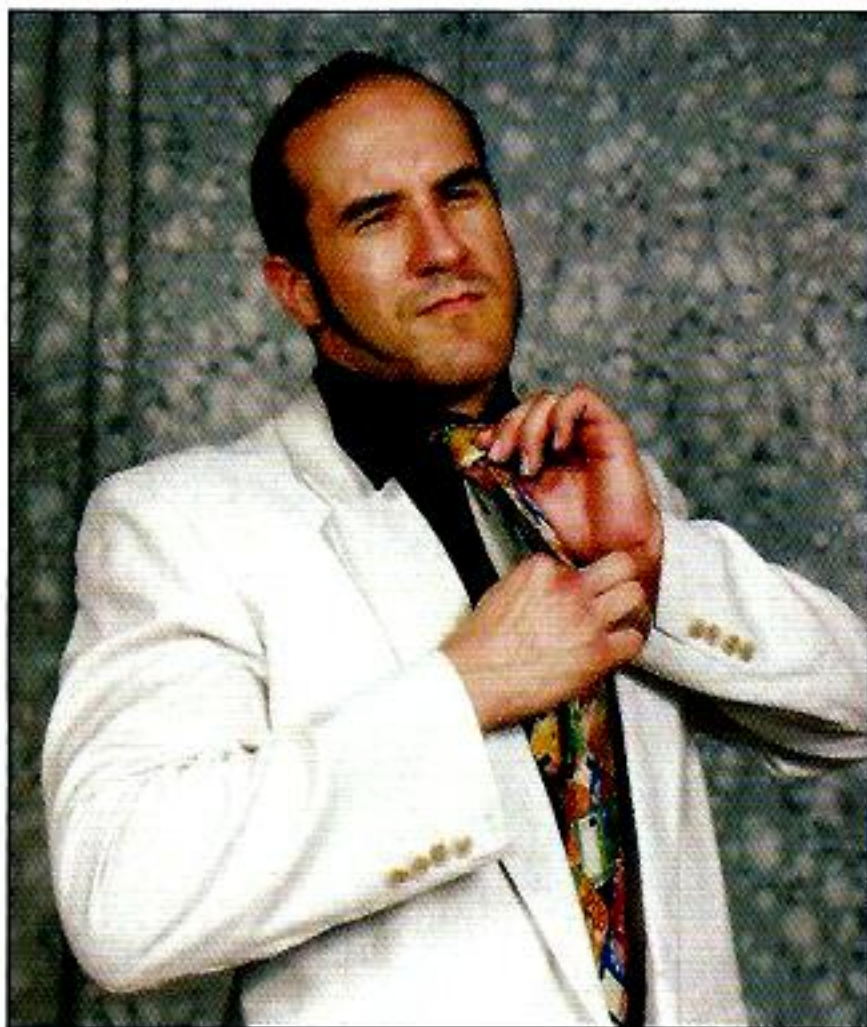
Like me, Hero saw tremendous promise in the Swiss rookie, and we decided to find a way to bring him to the United States.

A few months later, we succeeded in a limited fashion. At CHIKARA's Tag World Grand Prix 2003, "Swiss Money Holding," the combination of Castagnoli and Ares, made a strong showing and impressed the fans in attendance. Their stay here was brief, but the excitement of the American independents captivated Castagnoli enough that he began pursuing a visa to move here.

In the summer of 2004, Castagnoli packed his bags and flew from Zurich to Philadelphia, soon to become a permanent resident of the United States. His physique and stature, complemented by his flawless ring work, made him an instant standout everywhere he went. He made impressive showings in key independent tournaments such as IWA Mid-South's Ted Petty Invitational and Combat Zone Wrestling's Best of the Best, and CHIKARA's Tag World Grand Prix in 2005 and 2006, with different partners.

By then, Castagnoli and Hero, collectively called "The Kings Of Wrestling," had started on their way to becoming the American independents' most dominant tandem, rising through the ranks of promotions such as California's Pro Wrestling Guerrilla and Ring of Honor. Castagnoli was on top of his game, and the watchful eyes of World Wrestling Entertainment were already upon him.

If Castagnoli had relocated to America to improve his chances of earning a big-league contract, then his gamble paid off in November 2006. After stunning talent scouts during a week's stay in WWE's Deep South Wrestling developmental camp, the Swiss heavyweight was rewarded with an offer. The dream that so many have, but so few actually reach, was within his grasp. In mid-November, Castagnoli signed a developmental contract with



Why wouldn't WWE be interested in Claudio Castagnoli? At a power-packed 238 pounds, and standing 6'5", he is the type of physical specimen that WWE likes to recruit. And, considering that he has the arrogance of a Swiss banker, he already has a marketable persona.

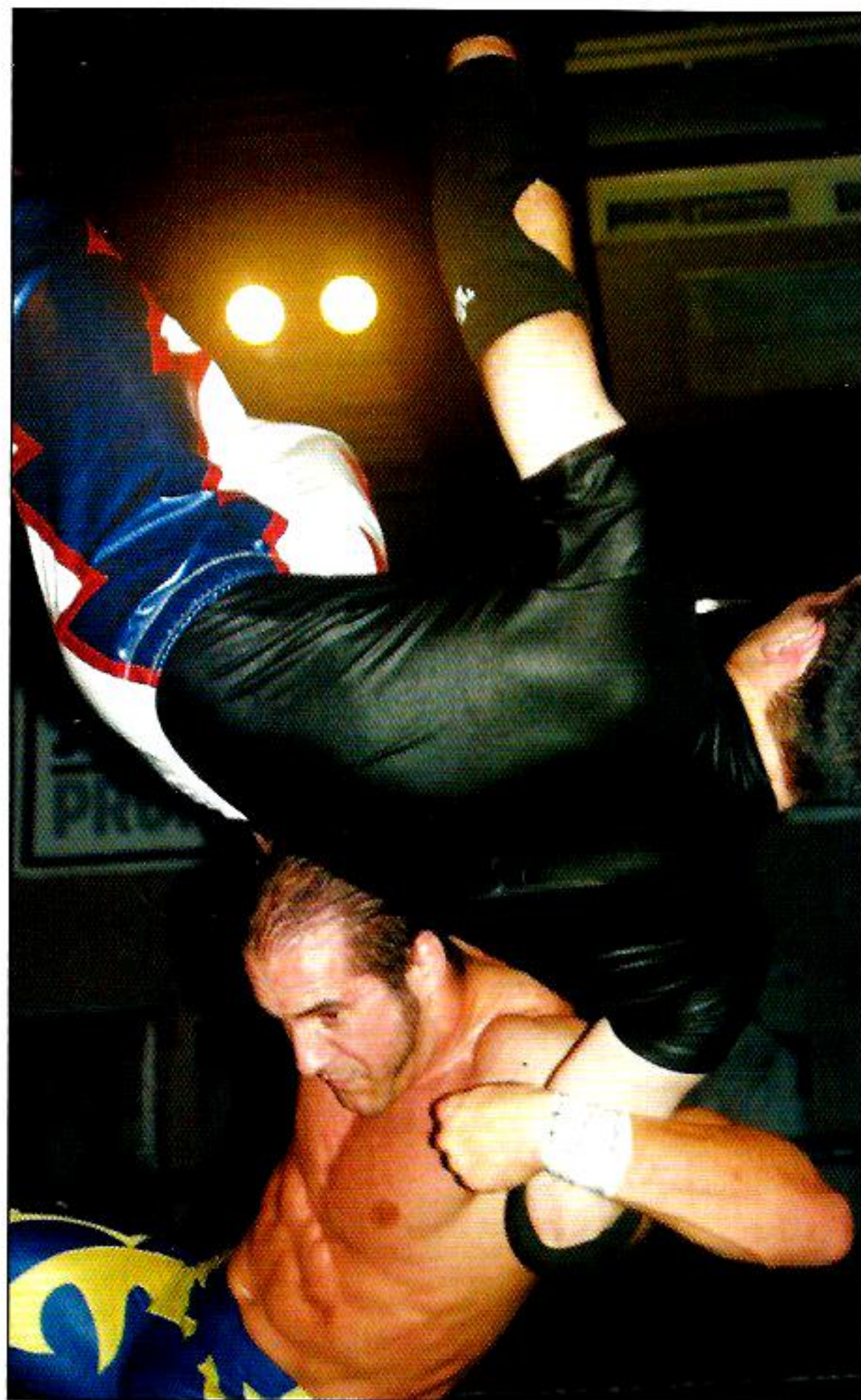
WWE, and was set to relocate to begin a new phase of his career.

In short order, the team of Hero and Castagnoli fell apart. Tag team championships were lost as quickly as they had been won. The seeds of jealousy sprouted up at Castagnoli's farewell match at CHIKARA, where Hero had some harsh words for his departing partner before delivering a beatdown. Independent wrestling fans were torn over the news of Castagnoli's imminent departure. They would miss seeing a remarkable athlete at local, monthly shows, but were proud to see an independent rise to his full potential. Those individuals, including me, who were involved in his training and even wrestled him, echoed those sentiments. Having one of my great rivals leave for the big leagues was bittersweet.

My in-ring rivalry with Castagnoli aside, I certainly felt a measure of pride in knowing that a wrestler I had helped train was heading to WWE, and, inevitably, the international stage and spotlight. It would be a detriment to the independents to lose such a terrific talent, but it would also bolster the independents' reputation for being the breeding ground for future superstars. All that remained was for Castagnoli to make as big an impact on WWE television as he had on the independent scene.

Just one month after signing his developmental contract with WWE, Castagnoli got a call that would change his life again. For reasons still unclear at press time, WWE released their first Swiss signee before he ever wrestled a single match under its banner. It seems that Castagnoli's comeback tour is destined to begin immediately following Castagnoli's farewell tour.

Speculating on WWE's motives would be pointless, considering that so many of its business decisions are utterly baffling. WWE hires ex-bikini models on an annual basis to fill up its roster, and recruits soap opera writers with no knowledge of pro wrestling to bolster its creative team. Mistaking pro wrestling for sports entertainment will do that, I suppose.



Castagnoli takes over Mike Quackenbush with this inverted fireman's carry during a June 2006 match. Quackenbush, who helped train Castagnoli, has always been impressed by his natural ability. His background in European wrestling is also a plus.

What remains in the wake of this odd situation is a wrestler whose potential is undiminished and whose star-power is untarnished. No bureaucratic snafu can derail the career of Claudio Castagnoli, and I say this based on first-hand experience. Now, more than ever, the Swiss expatriate has something to prove to the world. I see it in his eyes

every day at training, and he wears his newfound dedication on his face quite plainly. His brief, ill-fated ride on the WWE rollercoaster hasn't broken Castagnoli's spirit. It's simply unleashed a new side of him. Like a shark whose dinner got away, Castagnoli will be that much more dangerous when his second WWE stint inevitably arrives. □

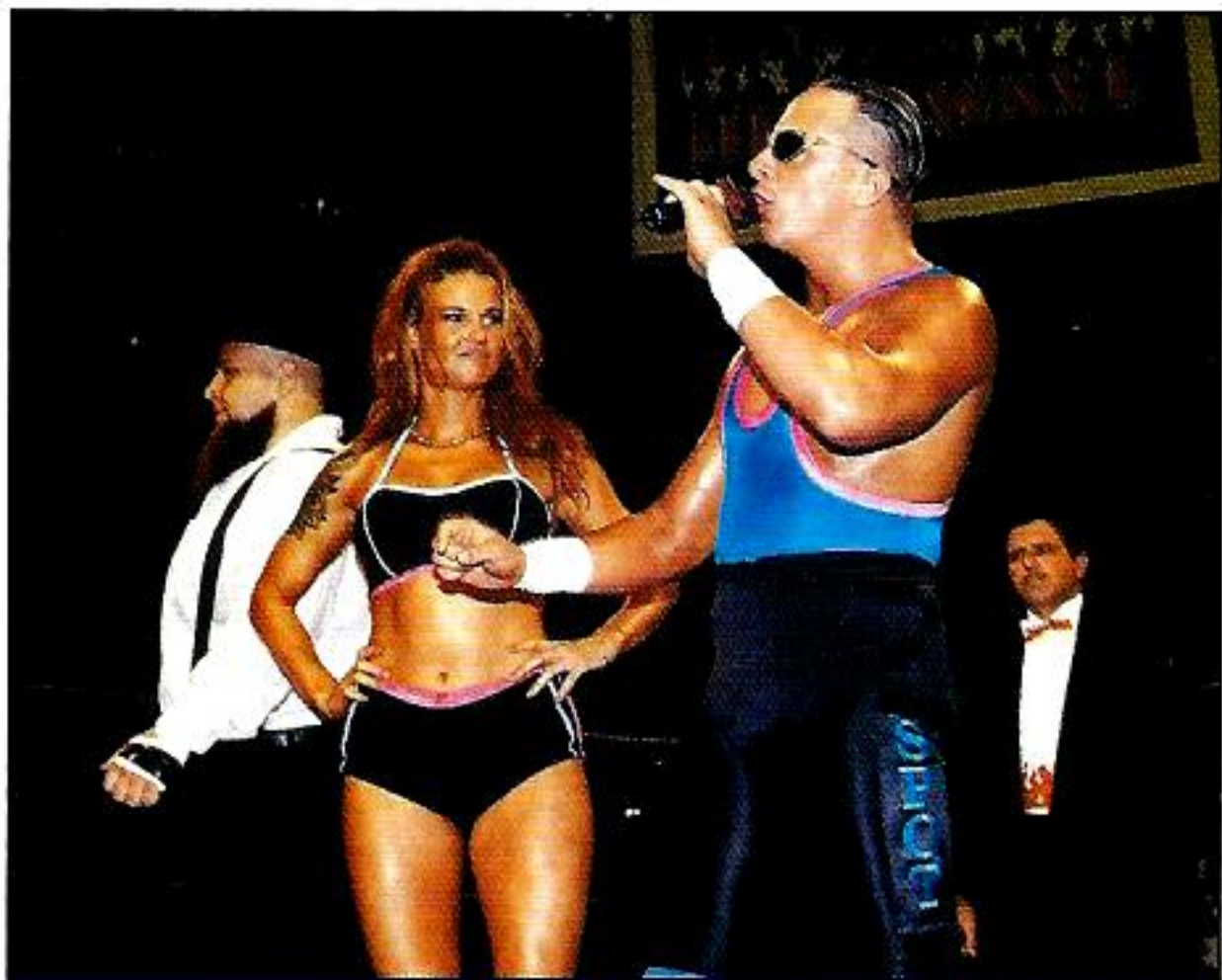
Spotlight On...

LITA

AT THIS YEAR'S Survivor Series, Mickie James defeated Lita to become the WWE women's champion. It was a heart-breaking loss for Lita. She had announced prior to the event that she would be retiring from wrestling, and she declared that she would do so in the same fashion Trish Stratus had a month earlier—holding the women's title. Though she was unable to live up to her prediction, the match marked the conclusion (for now, at least) of a remarkable career that spanned nearly a decade in several promotions in the United States and Mexico ... In the late-1990s, Lita (then Amy Dumas) attended a taping of *WCW Monday Nitro* with her wrestling fan boyfriend ... Caught a glimpse of Rey Mysterio Jr.'s aerial assault and fell in

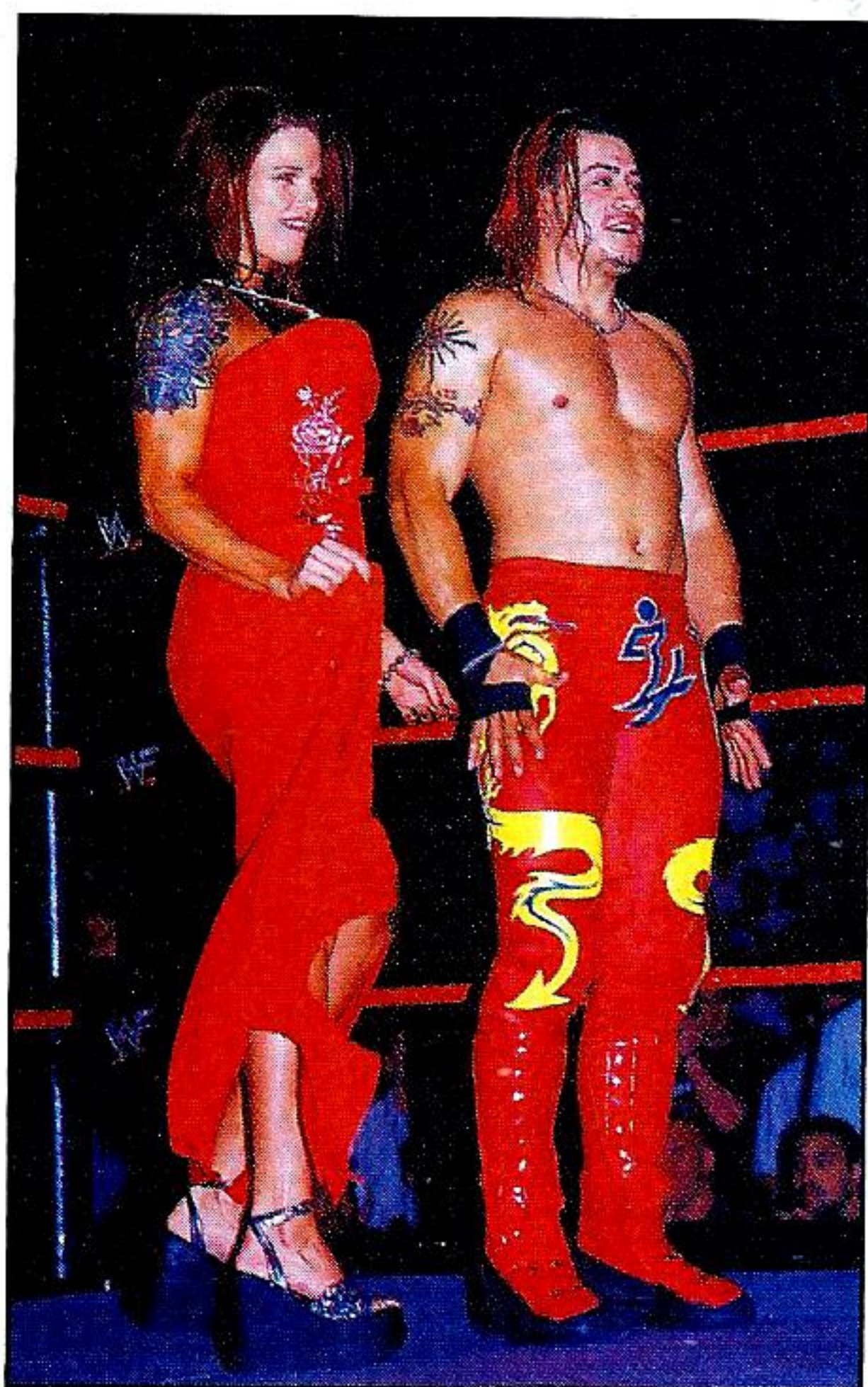
love with the sport ... Traveled to Mexico, where she learned the ins and outs of lucha libre, working for the Mexican promotion CMLL ... After a very brief time in Peru and after completing her CMLL stint, Lita returned to the U.S., where she worked as a valet on the independent scene as a valet named Angelica ... Managed Christopher Daniels, and garnered the attention of fans and promoters throughout the wrestling world ... Hired by ECW's Paul Heyman in early-1999 ... Became the girlfriend of Danny Doring, the first of many wrestlers to whom she'd be romantically linked as part of a storyline ... Billed as Miss Congeniality for most of her time in ECW ... Her stay in ECW paid off in more ways than just the national exposure she received ...

Through her experience in ECW, she was introduced to the legendary Dory Funk Jr. ... Funk trained Lita, alongside several male wrestlers ... Her drive and talent made her a standout at Funk's school and led to her receiving a developmental deal with the WWF ... Left ECW for the WWF's training territory, Memphis Championship Wrestling, in October 1999 ... Re-christened as "Lita" and worked as a valet for Essa Rios in Memphis Championship Wrestling ... Together, Rios and Lita entered the WWF in early-2000 ... Shortly after their debut in the WWF, Rios won the light heavyweight belt ... Lita would help Rios defend the belt, attacking his opponents outside the ring ... The pair feuded with Eddie Guerrero and his valet, Chyna ... Rios soon turned against Lita, putting an end to their relationship and the feud with Eddie and Chyna ... With Rios, Guerrero, and Chyna behind her, Lita found herself in a new alliance—one that would ultimately define her career ... Joined Matt and Jeff, The Hardy Boyz, as their valet ... The trio became Team Extreme and dressed in attire that better reflected their punk attitudes ... Lita's clothing included her trademark low-ride jeans and visible thong ... Team Extreme's first battles were against Trish Stratus' T&A (Test and Albert) ... Stratus and Lita would remain rivals for the rest of their careers ... Team Extreme got the upper hand on T&A in several of their encounters, and eventually Lita moved on to more challenging pursuits ... Defeated Stephanie McMahon in August 2000, a mere six months after her arrival in the WWF, to become the women's champion ... Lita's teammates in Team Extreme, Matt and Jeff Hardy, also won the



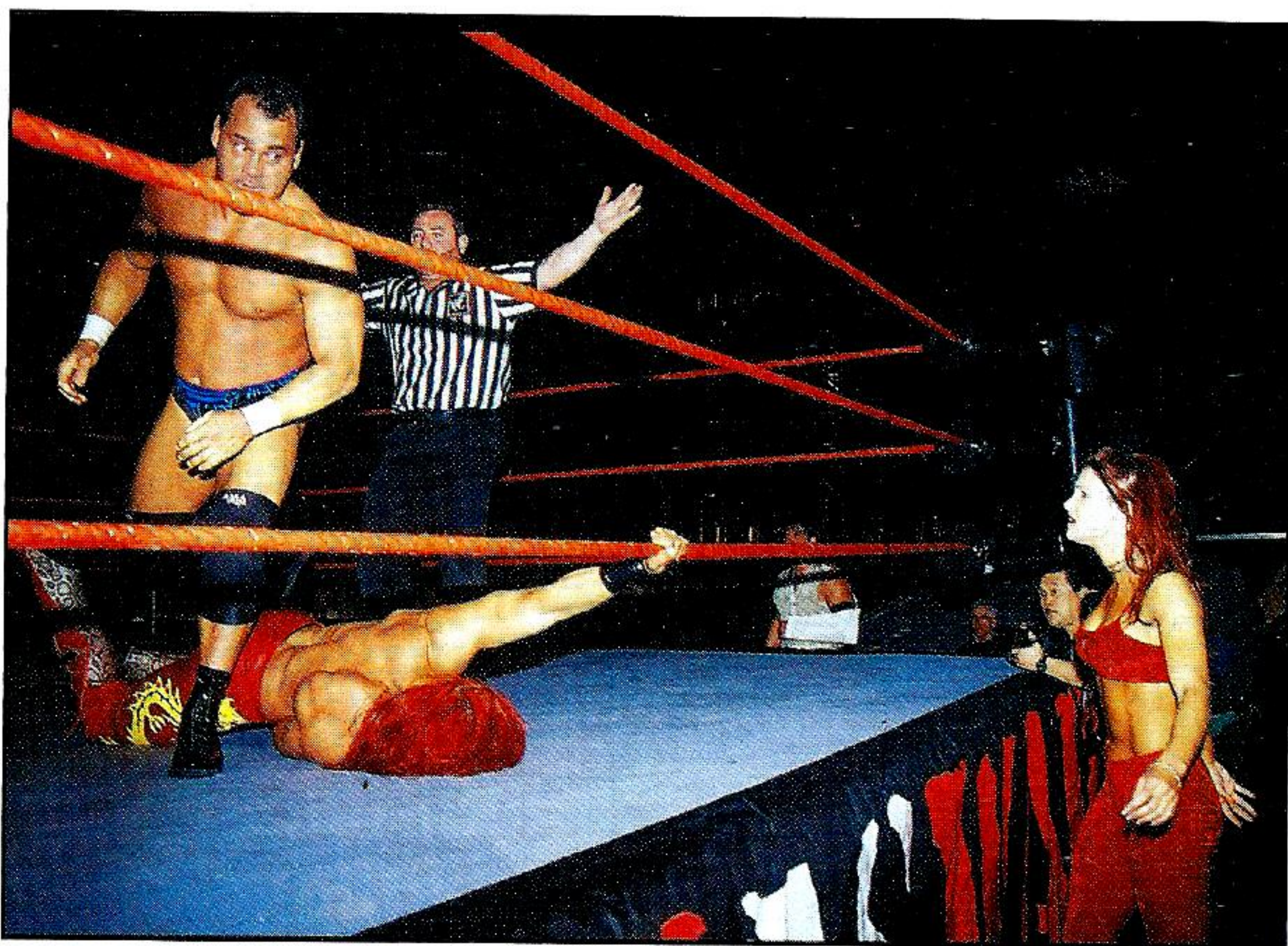
May 1999: As the valet for Danny Doring and Amish Roadkill in ECW, Dumas adopted the "Miss Congeniality" moniker. She was also known as "Angelica" on the independent circuit.





October 1999: Dumas left ECW to train in the WWF's developmental affiliate, Memphis Championship Wrestling. Taking on the name "Lita," she becomes a valet for Essa Rios. The two would later begin their tenures in the WWF at the start of 2000.

WWF World tag team championship during this same period ... When The Hardy Boyz feuded with Edge and Christian, Lita found herself on the receiving end of an attack from her team's rivals, costing her the women's championship ... In spite of losing the belt, Lita attracted the romantic atten-



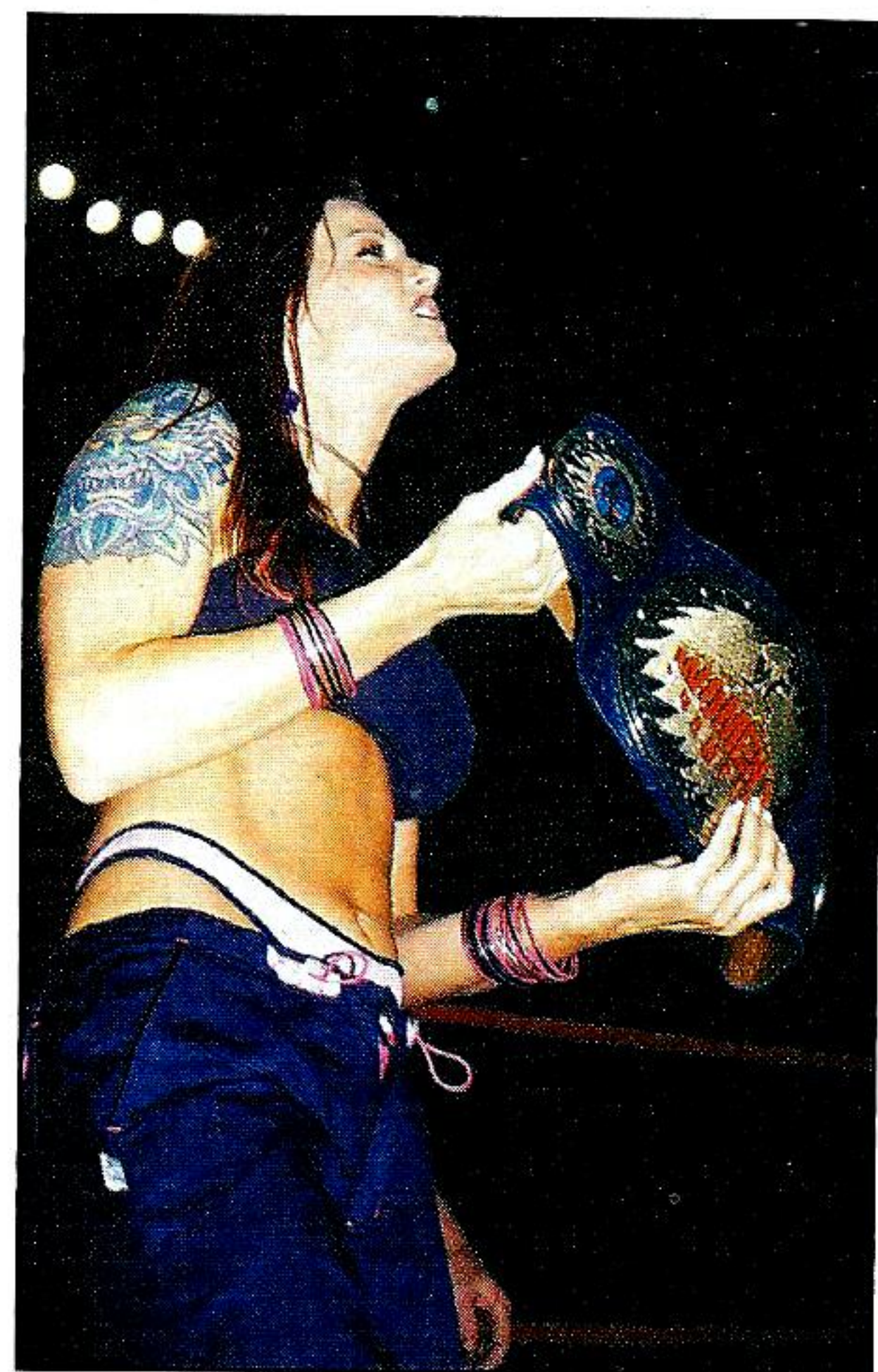
March 2000: Lita stands by helplessly as Essa Rios struggles in vain to hold on to the WWF light heavyweight title during a live Raw at New Jersey's Meadowlands. Dean Malenko eyes the lovely Lita en route to his championship victory.

tion of Dean Malenko, and feuded with him ... Hooked up with Matt Hardy in another storyline affair ... Began her quest to recapture the women's title held by Chyna ... Meanwhile, Eddie Guerrero began feuding with The Hardy Boyz and hoped to find love with Lita as others had before ... Both feuds ended abruptly, however, when both Guerrero and Chyna left the WWF to handle personal problems ... By the summer of 2001, Lita was a staple on

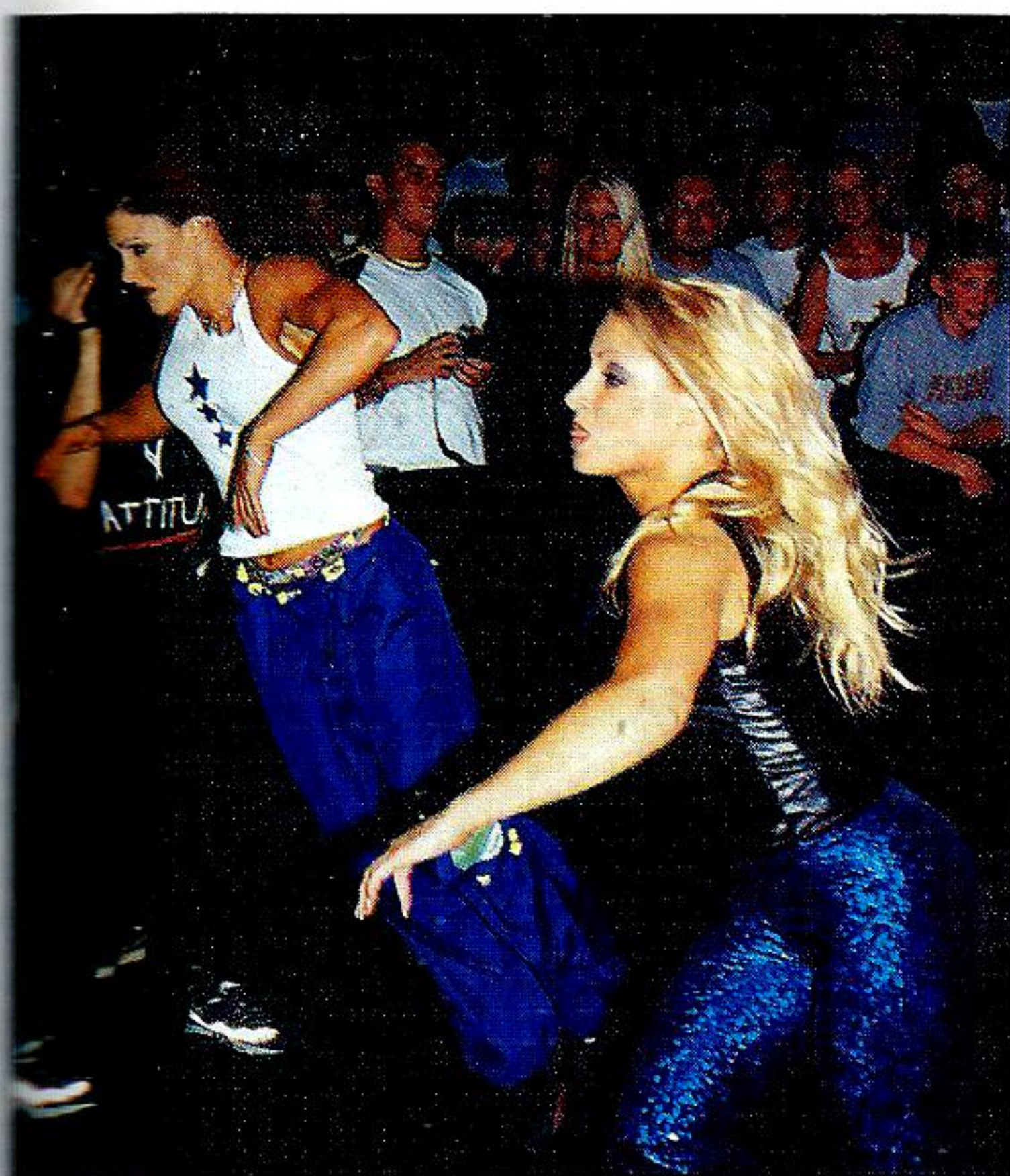
WWF programming, and represented the company in a bra-and-panties match, teaming with archenemy Trish Stratus to take on the WCW/ECW Alliance's Torrie Wilson and Stacy Keibler at Invasion ... In late-2001 and early-2002, Team Extreme found itself splintering, with Lita caught in the mid-



July 2000: Lita leaves Rios behind to join Team Extreme with Jeff and Matt Hardy, and the trio feuds with Trish Stratus' T&A tandem. This was the beginning of Lita's long rivalry with Stratus.



August 2000: Lita finds success away from the popular Hardy Boyz, winning the WWF women's title from Stephanie McMahon-Helmsley in Raw's first-ever women's title main event.



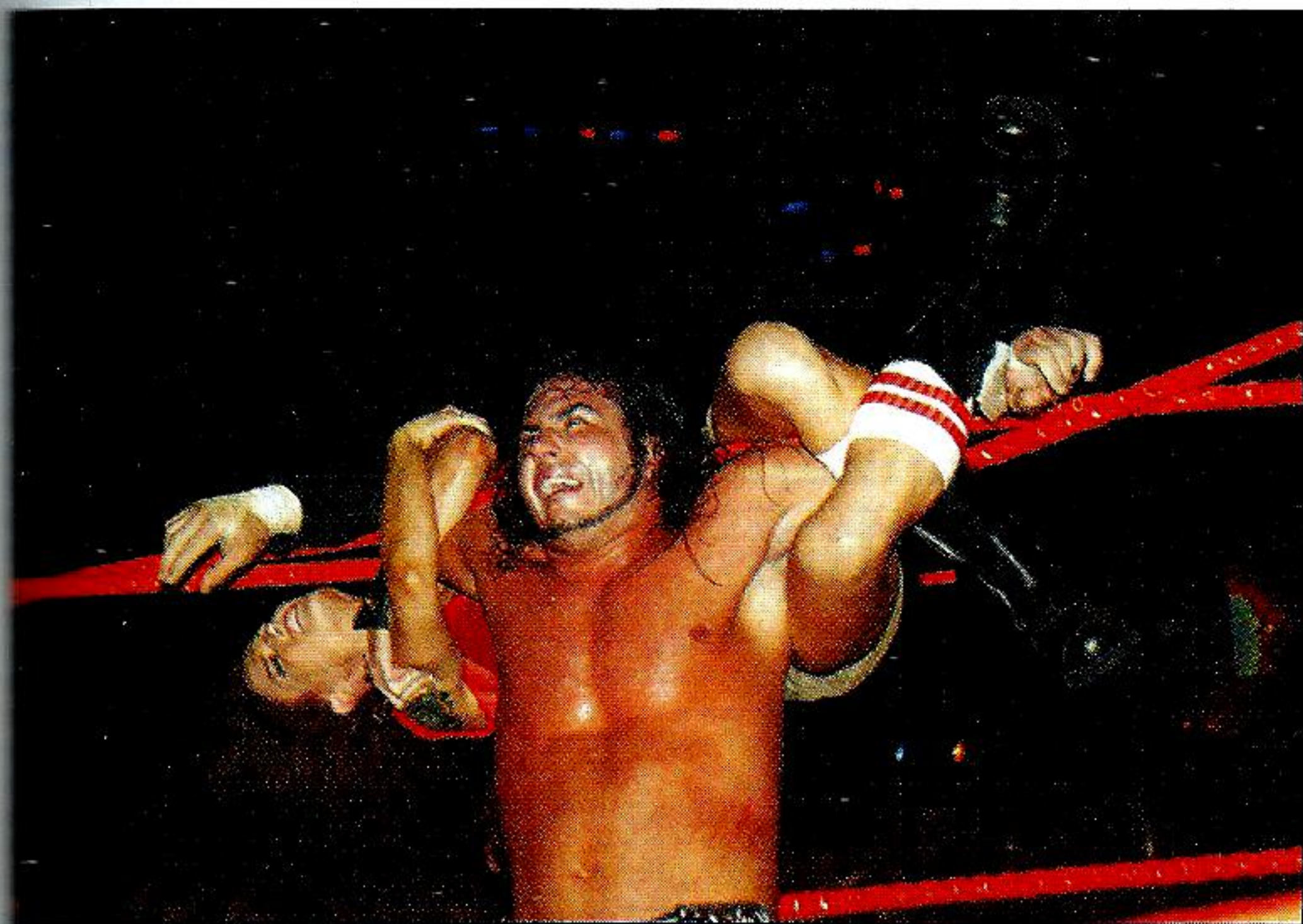
July 2001: Lita teams with her longtime enemy, Trish Stratus, to face the WCW/ECW Alliance's Torrie Wilson and Stacy Kiebler in a bra-and-panties match at Invasion. Despite her fine wrestling ability, Lita was often relegated to this type of bout.

... of a feud between Matt and Jeff ... Both Jeff and Lita were injured by The Undertaker ... Matt and Lita continued their romance both on and off television ... While filming an episode of *Dark Angel* in 2002, Lita sustained a serious neck injury that required surgery ... Returned to WWF television in October 2002 as a color commentator for *Sunday Night Heat* after six months of rehab ... Lita was fired

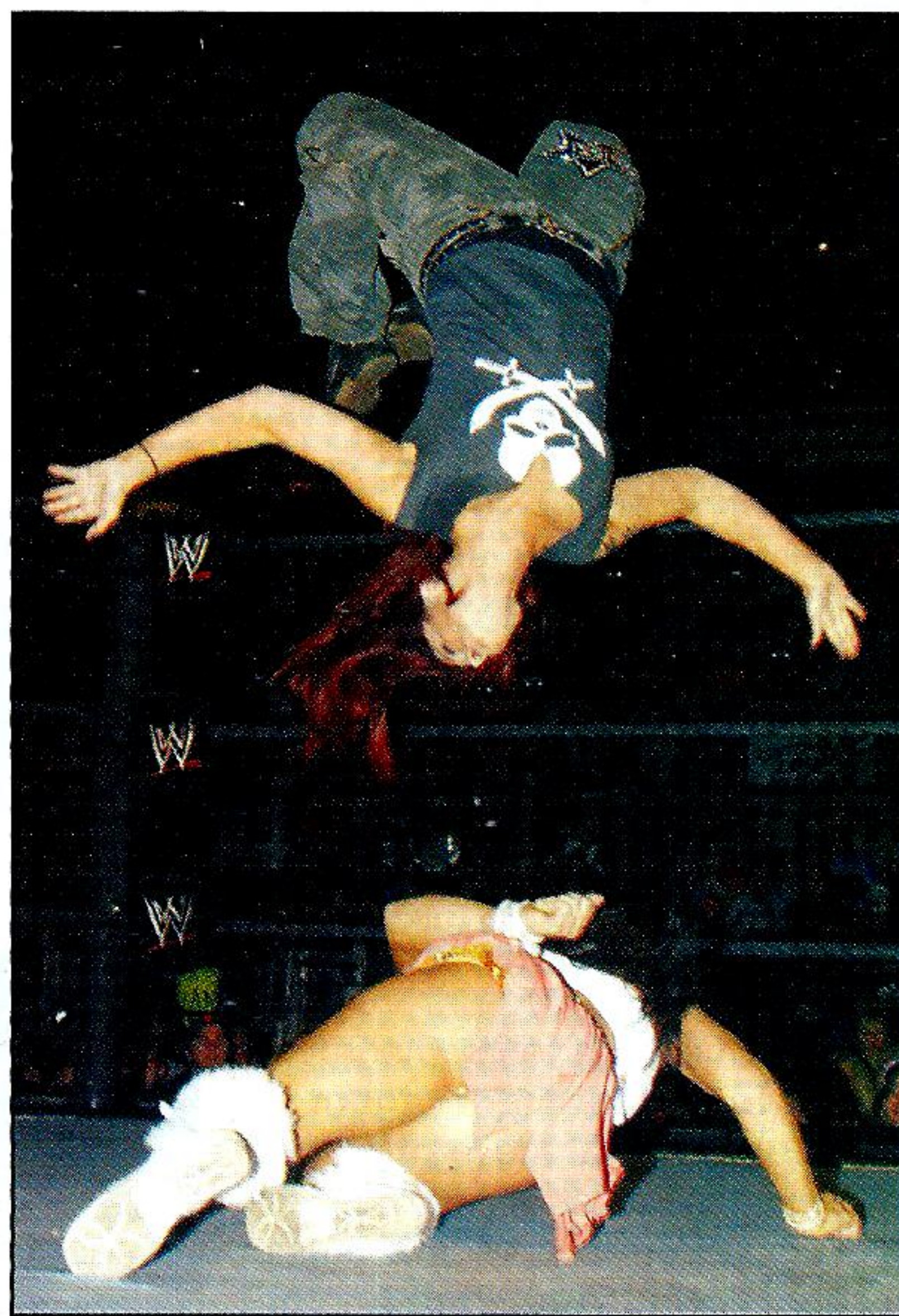
by Raw General Manager Eric Bischoff after six months as commentator ... Was rehired by co-General Manager Steve Austin in September 2003, and, upon her return, rekindled her on-air relationship with Matt Hardy ... Matt soon turned against Lita, however, wrestling her in several inter-gender tag matches ... Began dating Christian on-air while on the rebound from her relationship with Matt (but their relationship continued off the air) ... Dated Christian in a storyline that revealed he dated her only to win a bet with Chris Jericho ... Eventually reconnected with Matt, who returned to her side to save her from Kane ... Kane was

yet another in a long list of Lita's suitors ... Lita discovered she was pregnant, and Matt wanted to propose to her, but it was discovered that Kane was actually the father of her baby, not Matt ... Matt and Kane feuded, and Lita was forced to marry Kane after Hardy lost a match to the "Big Red Machine" ... Became Kane's valet,

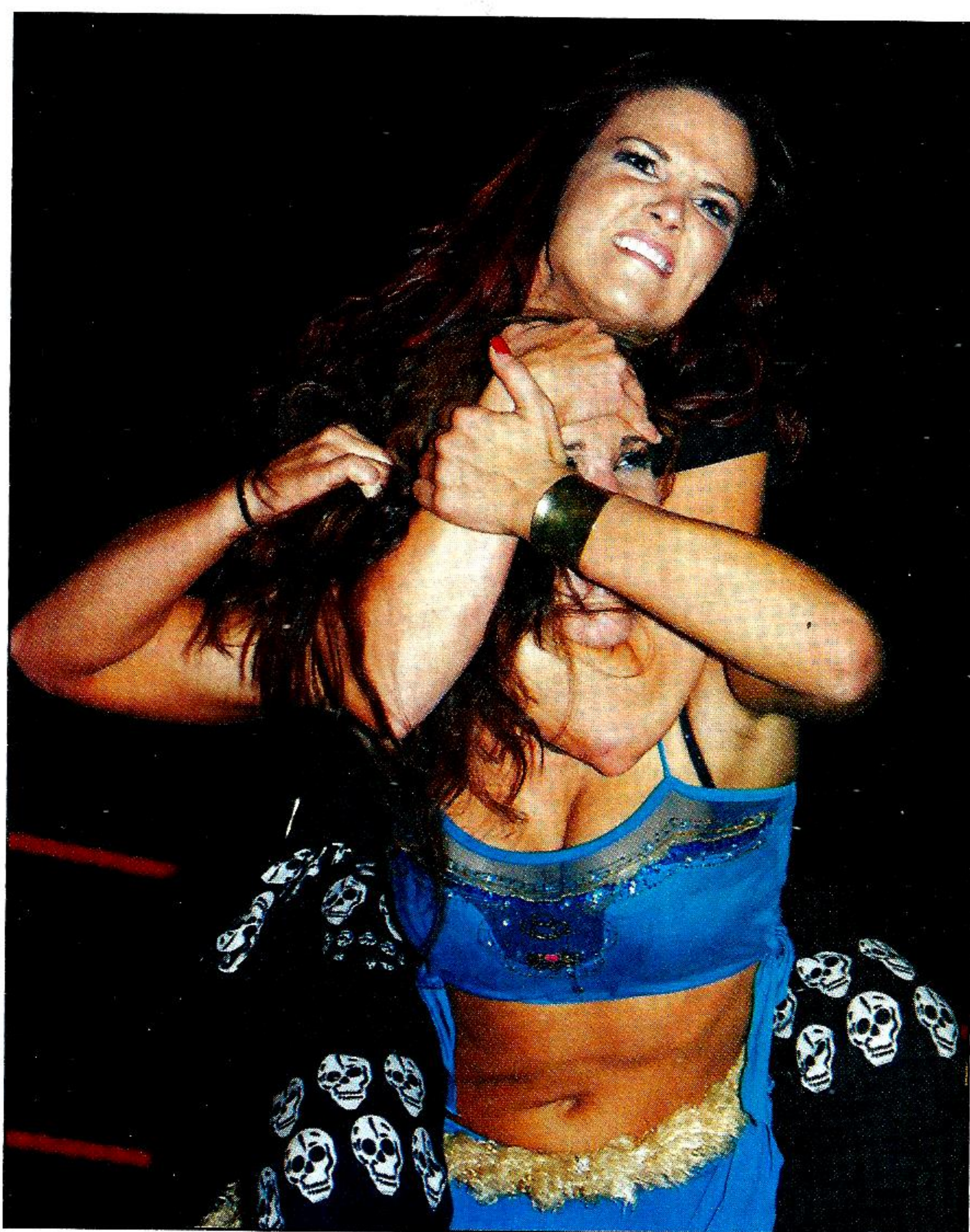
often helping his opponents ... She endured a miscarriage after Snitsky attacked Kane, and Kane accidentally landed on her ... Teamed with Kane and the two feuded with Snitsky for much of 2004 ... Won her second women's championship in late-2004, but lost the belt to long-time rival Trish Stratus ... Sustained another serious injury, this time to her knee, keeping her out of action for several months in 2005 ... Her real-life relationship with Matt Hardy came to an end in 2005, thanks to an affair she had with Edge ... Lita and Edge became on-air partners when Lita betrayed and divorced her storyline husband, Kane ... Lita and Edge have been side by side ever since ... In the summer of 2005, Lita sided with Edge in his vendetta against Hardy ... Edge eventually defeated Hardy, sending him to Smackdown in a loser-leaves-Raw match ... Engaged in a "live sex celebration" on Raw with Edge in early-2006 after Edge's first Raw World title win ... Their party was ruined by for-



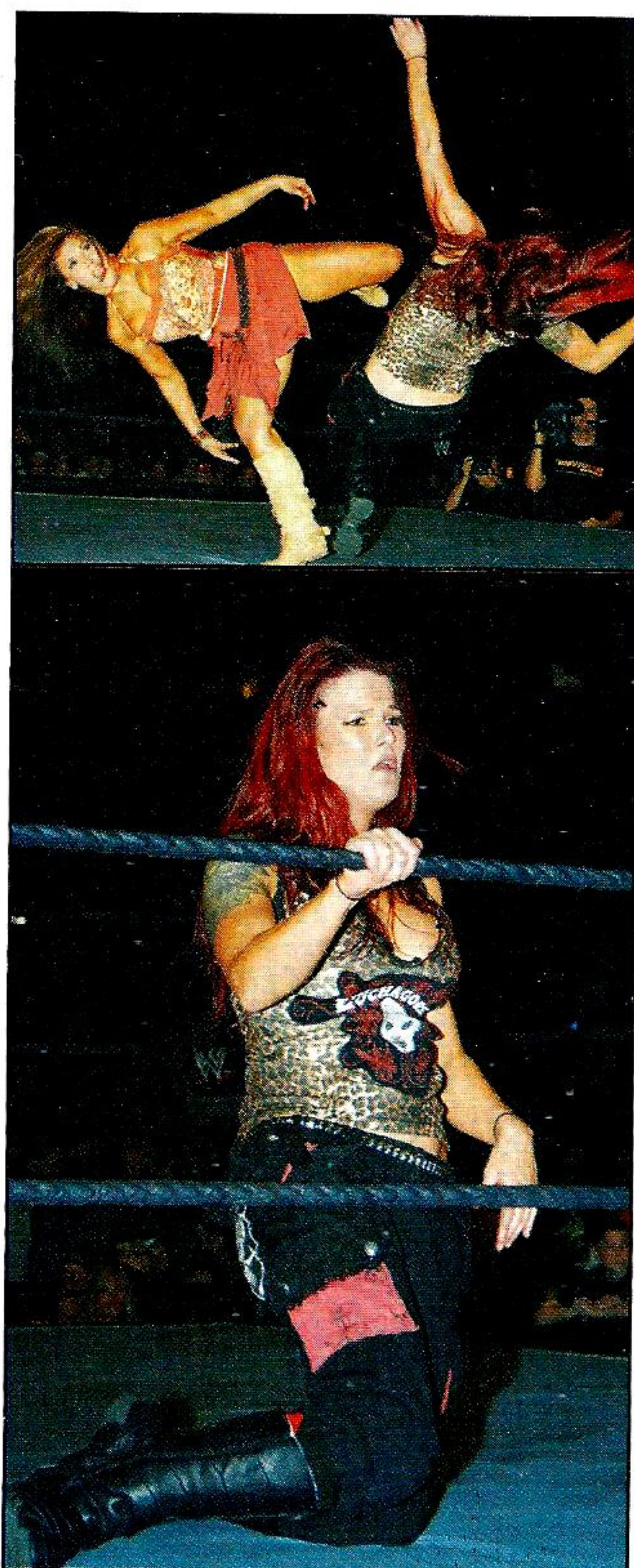
October 2005: A feud between Lita's former and current lovers, Matt Hardy and Edge, causes Lita to fight her former Team Extreme partner, humiliating him in the process. Lita lost many of her fans during this public spectacle.



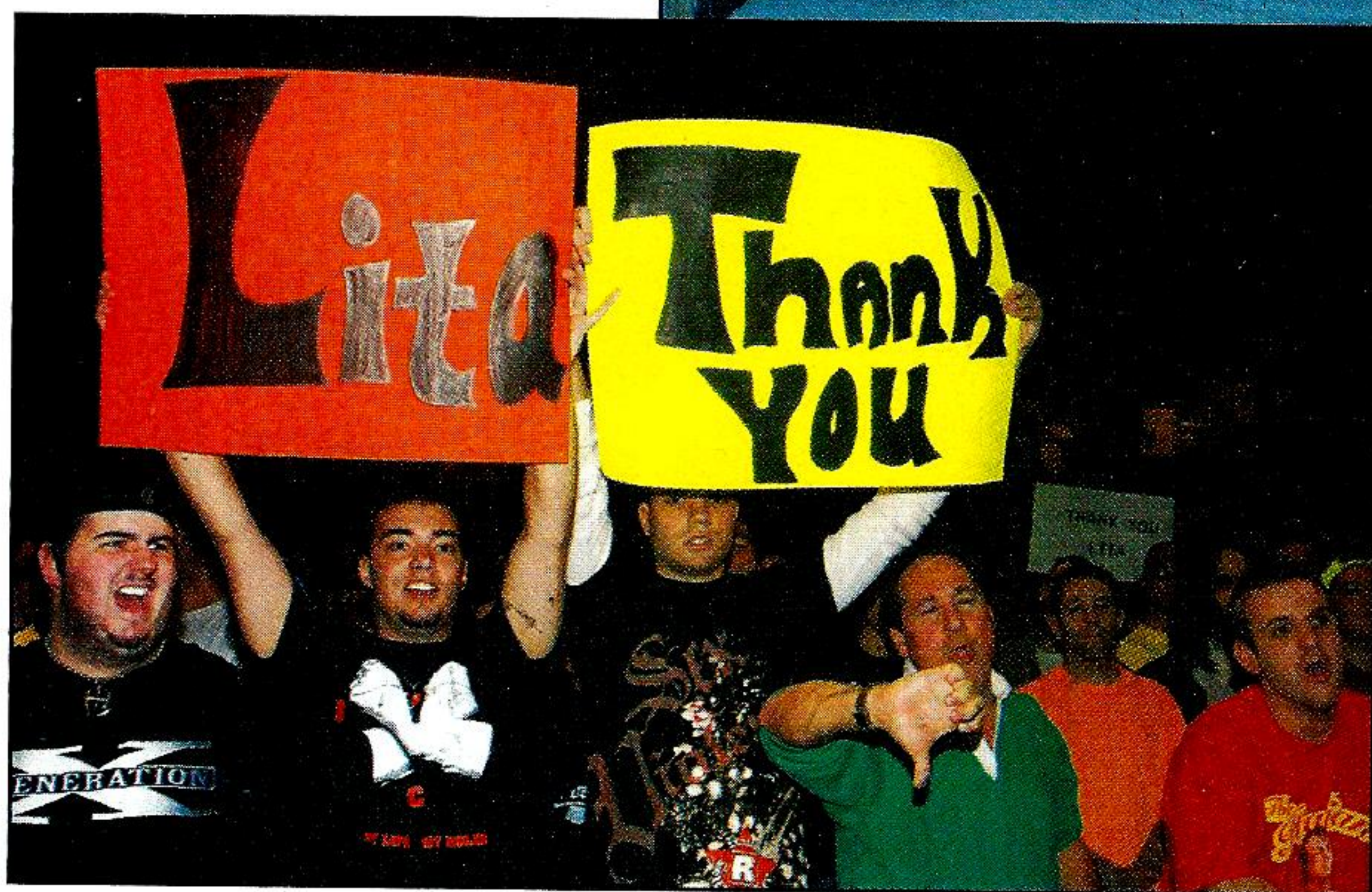
May 2006: After a long hiatus from in-ring action, Lita returns to her luchador roots, battling a new generation of women, including Mickie James. Lita had been no more than a glorified valet since joining Edge, but Lita would reclaim the women's title in August 2006.



November 2006: Lita wins the women's title for the second time in a year, beating Mickie James for the vacant championship at Cyber Sunday. Her rival, Trish Stratus, had vacated the title in September.



mer champ John Cena ... Lita helped Edge throughout the year in his campaign to regain the Raw World championship ... Returned to ECW in June, wrestling in a mixed tag match ... Recaptured the women's title from Mickie James in August, holding it while Edge was Raw World champion ... Lost the championship to Trish Stratus at Unforgiven in September ... Beat Mickie James in a tournament final to win the vacant title again in October ... Lost the belt in her retirement match at Survivor Series, and moved on to pursue a music career with her band, the Luchagors ... Lita will always be remembered as a powerful female competitor and four-time WWE women's champion. □



November 2006: The four-time women's champion experiences mixed emotions as she leaves WWE in less-than-flattering fashion. At Survivor Series, the fans offered their thanks (above), Mickie James handed her a defeat when she reclaimed the women's title (top), and Cryme Tyme humiliated Lita by auctioning off her stolen personal items (center).

Q&A

Paul Orndorff

I Preferred Six-Pack Abs To A Six-Pack Of Beer

WHERE IS PAUL ORNDORFF? Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, Roddy Piper, Bob Orton Jr., Dusty Rhodes, Sgt. Slaughter, and Jim Duggan are some of the superstars from the 1980s who have been featured prominently on WWE programming over the past couple of years, and there have been DVD compilations dedicated to Flair, Piper, and Rhodes, but sightings of "Mr. Wonderful" have been few and far between.

The one exception was Orndorff's induction into the WWE Hall of Fame in 2005. It was appropriate that Orndorff—whose in-ring career spanned from 1976 to 2000—was inducted during the same ceremony as his great nemesis, Hulk Hogan. A football player-turned-wrestler who main-evented throughout the South before going to the WWF, Orndorff was Hogan's first great rival, battling "The Hulkster" around the circuit throughout much of 1984 and early '85. "Mr. Wonderful" was in the main event at the first WrestleMania, teaming with Roddy Piper against Hogan and Mr. T. When Piper's bodyguard, Bob Orton Jr., accidentally caused Orndorff to be pinned in that match, the stage was set for the Florida native to become a fan favorite.

Yet Vince McMahon couldn't resist the money-making potential of Orndorff-Hogan. Orndorff, supposedly jealous of Hogan's success, turned heel again. The result was another series of lucrative matches, including a showdown that drew a record-breaking 74,080 fans to Toronto's Exhibition Stadium on August 28, 1986. The live gate of \$1.2-million (Canadian) was a phenomenal figure for a house show.

A fluke injury ended Orndorff's incredible momentum. According to Orndorff, he suffered a serious spinal injury when Roddy Piper mule-kicked him during a tag team match in Toronto. Fragments of Orndorff's vertebrae began pinching his nerve. But, instead of submitting to spinal surgery that would derail his hot run against Hogan, he opted to tough it out.

Orndorff would regret that later. He lost much of the strength on the right side of his body. Only his sheer tenacity allowed him to

overcome the daily pain to train in the gym and perform in the ring. The injury forced Orndorff out of the WWF while he was still at his peak. In fact, his entire '90s run in WCW was a nightly battle to overcome his disability. Eventually, though, Orndorff became head of WCW's Power Plant and ended his career on a positive note, providing guidance to aspiring wrestlers.

"During our conversation, Orndorff insisted that he no longer needs the wrestling business for his self-esteem, and is perfectly satisfied with hunting and spending time with his family in Georgia," said Editor-in-Chief Harry Burkett, who conducted the 90-minute interview. "But I still got the sense that he didn't like the way his tenure ended in the WWF. He needs some closure there, and I think the WWE hierarchy must realize that its history won't be complete until 'Mr. Wonderful' gets his due."

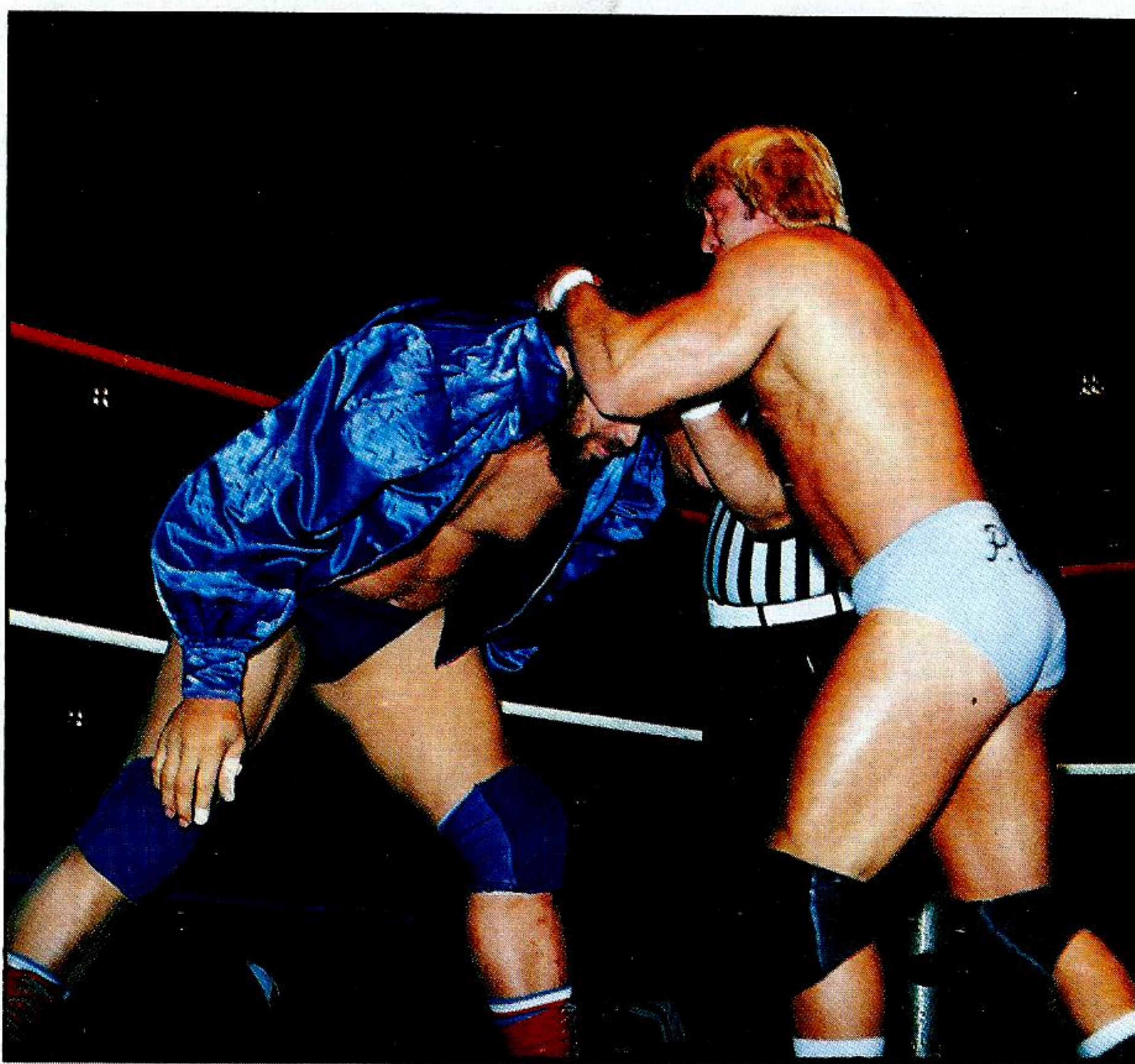
Q: We're probably in the biggest nostalgia craze that wrestling has ever experienced. First, there were nostalgia conventions and reunion shows on the independent circuit. Then WWE took notice of that market, and it has given greater prominence to its Hall of Fame, released several compilation DVDs, and launched WWE 24/7. Has your phone been ringing more often lately?

A: I've done a few autograph sessions, and I agree that trend is definitely out there. I think it all has to do with the breed of athletes that entered wrestling in the late-1970s and 1980s. Many of us were genuine ath-

It's been said that I was the first butt-kicking type heel, long before Steve Austin came along. I was very aggressive, very much in shape, a real go-getter. I took what I had learned in football and applied it to the ring.



When Orndorff came to our Pennsylvania office for this interview, the sight of Hulk Hogan on a poster-sized cover of *PWI* stirred up some old feelings. He grabbed the nearest weapon, a three-hole punch, and threatened to do a number on the 1994 Wrestler of the Year.



Orndorff tears into Ernie Ladd before the 6'9", 354-pounder has a chance to remove his ring jacket. But their heated rivalry inside the ring was much different from their relationship outside of it. The two former NFL players had great respect for each other.

letes who entered wrestling at that time, and we were products of the territorial system. We honed our craft in front of audiences night after night. And then, Vince McMahon went national and he had a deep talent pool of real professionals who could take wrestling to the next level.

Q: Do you think that today's pro wrestlers aren't the complete professionals that you guys were?

A: No, and I mean no disrespect toward them. They're just the products of a one-company system. It took me five years to truly figure out how to put people in seats. Early on, Bob Orton Sr. told me that learning the art of the business—the ring technique and psychology—is the key to being successful. Sure, being tight with someone in the office can get you pretty far. But, if your work is truly first-rate, they cannot deny you.

Q: You played football at the college level and in the NFL

before you became a wrestler. Did any of the guys hold that macho football player image against you?

A: It's been said that I was the first butt-kicking type heel, long before Steve Austin came along. I was very aggressive, very much in shape, a real go-getter. I took what I had learned in football and applied it to the ring. If a guy was going to wrestle me, he'd better be in shape and able to go. So, some of the boys might have held that against me to a point, but my ability in the ring spoke for itself.

Q: What were your accomplishments at the University of Tampa that caught the attention of the NFL?

A: Scouts liked my aggressiveness and my hitting. I was a fullback, and really good at blocking. John Matuszak was on the same team as me. Earl Bruce, who was the head coach in my senior year, ordered each of us to hit a two-man sled as hard as we could.

Whoever hit the sled and got off the ground the highest would get a \$100 bill. And here was John, about 295 pounds and very fast, a guy who ended up the number-one draft pick of the Houston Oilers. He was good, but "Mr. Wonderful" walked away with the \$100 bill.

Q: Today, you and the school would get in trouble over that \$100 bill. What NFL teams did you play for?

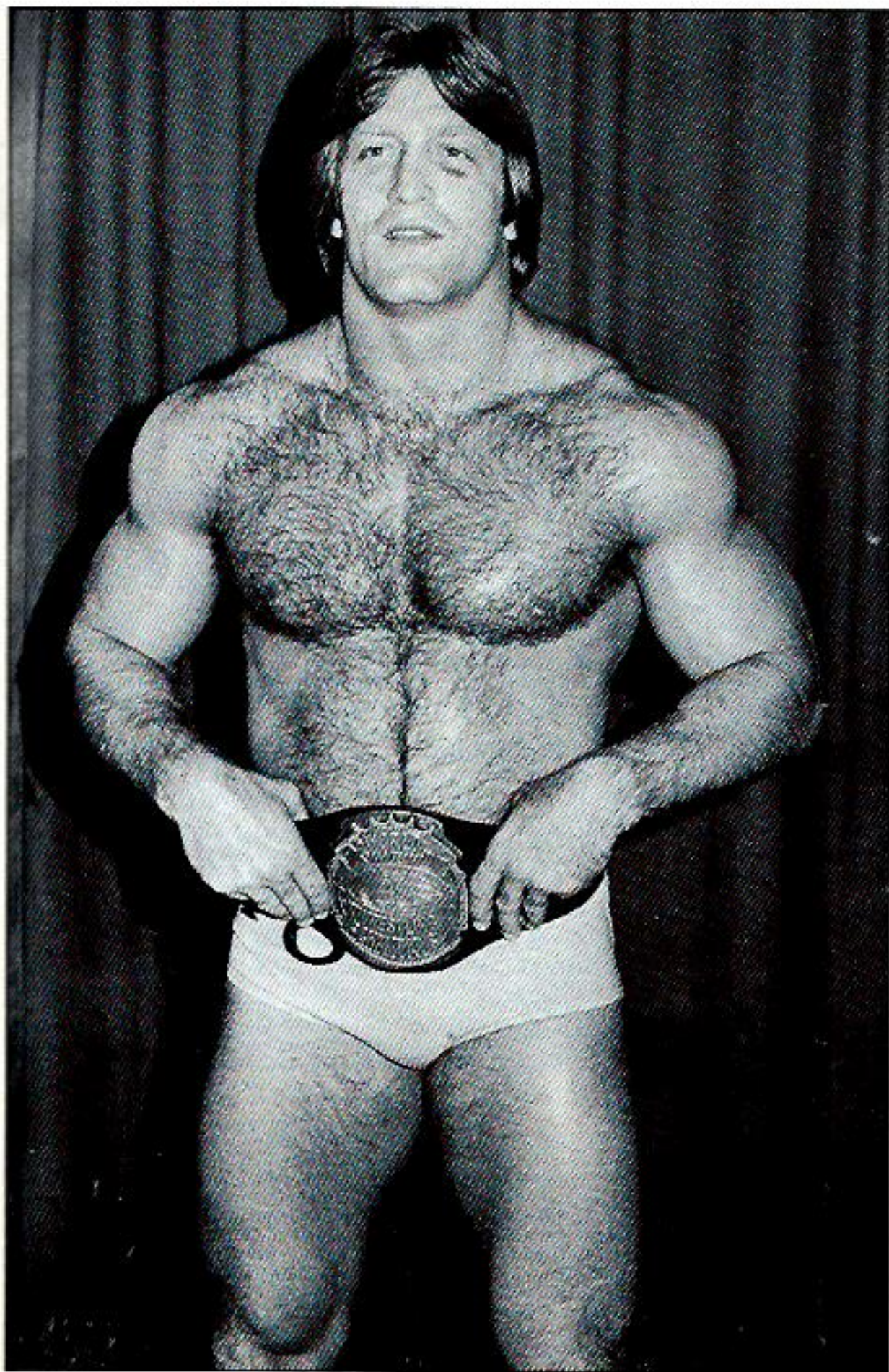
A: The New Orleans Saints and the Chicago Bears. The problem was that I had never been away from my family. When I got a college football scholarship, I stayed home in Tampa. But, at that young age, I was married and couldn't stand being away from my family. I had the skills and loved the contact on the football field. I was a first-string fullback for the Bears, and I'll always remember walking into the coach's office that day. I told him that I had to quit. It just got to the point that I had to choose between them and the road—and I couldn't afford to bring them with me. To me, my family was more important. After that, I got into wrestling. Because of the territorial system, I didn't have to go far from home, and I made a decent enough living that I could take my family with me if necessary. Later, when the WWF went national, I was more mature and better able to handle the traveling.

Q: Did you have any specific qualities as a football player that helped you in wrestling?

A: Intensity. That is something that you can't teach, but something you have in your heart, whether it's football or wrestling. From my style in the ring, down to my facial expressions, the fans knew I was trying to rip the other guy's head off. That made my style totally different from everyone else's, and it got me over everywhere I went.

Q: It seems that intensity is a key component that is missing

I went to the gym every day, ate the right foods, and stayed healthy. If I had a choice between staying up all night and going to the gym in the morning, I went to the gym. The wrestlers who didn't go to the gym regularly let their vices get out of hand.



The Florida native shows off his NWA World tag team title belt—and an ugly shiner—while backstage in Toronto in 1979. He and his partner, Jimmy Snuka, made title defenses in Toronto as well as the Mid-Atlantic area.

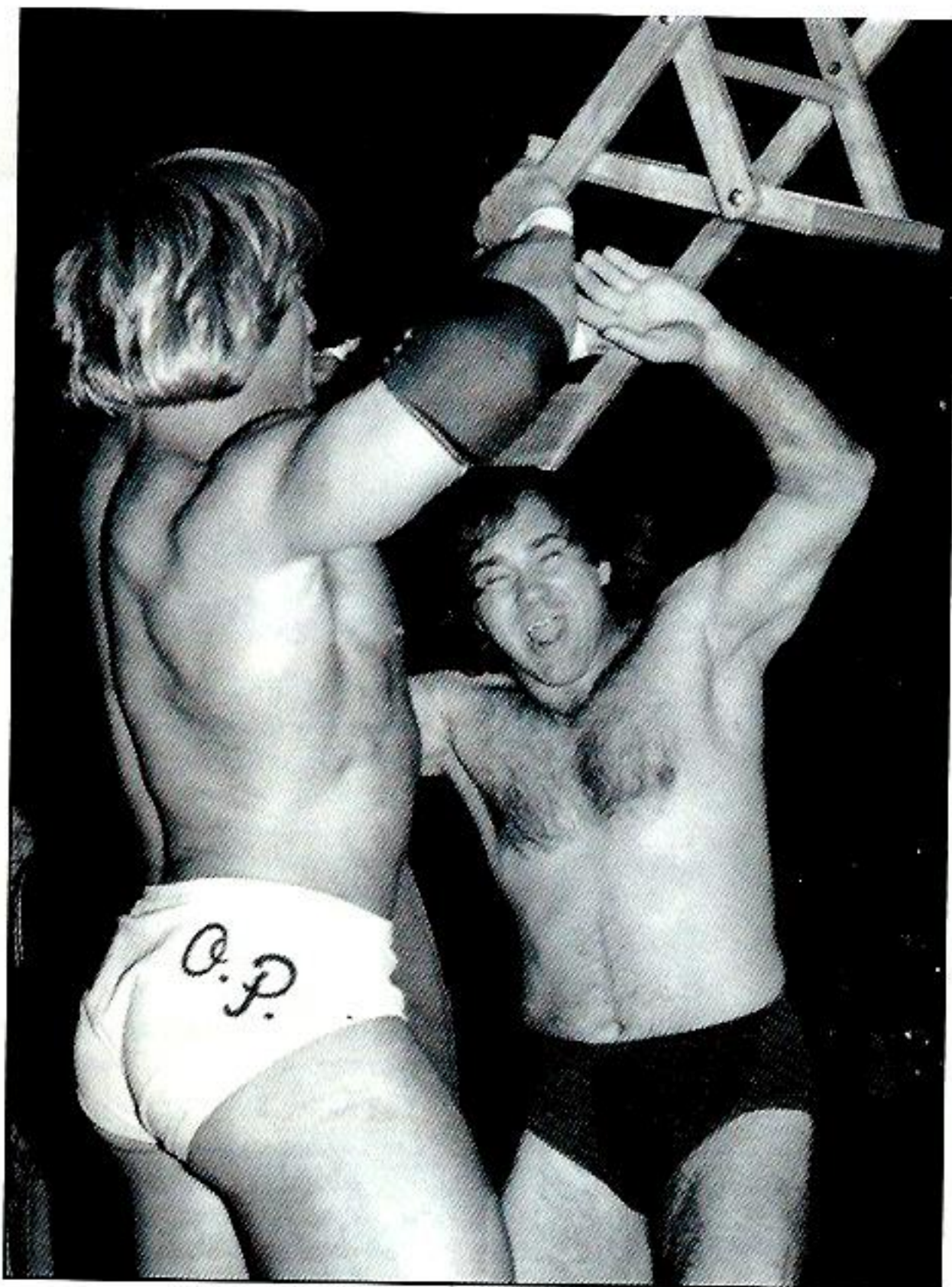


from today's wrestling. Because Creative so tightly controls what wrestlers say and do in the ring, it's hard for them to deliver something straight from the gut that would convey intensity. It's hard enough to remember everything you have to say to advance a storyline on a given night, let alone get worked up about it. I assume you agree with that.

A: Absolutely, Harry. Today, when I watch wrestling, it's hard to tell one guy from another. By taking away the art of the business, the subtlety and the storytelling, it just seems like a big glob of nothing. They have the physical aspect down, but not the psychology. Trust me, if you see a current star and a star from the '80s in the airport, I guarantee the wrestler from our era will be recognized more often. It's sad, because I think the fans are being short-changed.

Q: Were you a wrestling fan when you were growing up? What was your level of wrestling knowledge when you broke into the business?

A: Zero. That forced me to approach wrestling the way I approached football, like a physical sport. I went to the gym every day, ate the right foods, and stayed healthy. If I had a choice



SuperStation WTBS gave Orndorff national exposure for the first time in his career. The Georgia promotion was expanding beyond the borders of the Peach State and into nearby states such as Ohio. Here, Orndorff bashes Larry Zbyszko with a wooden chair in Toledo.

between staying up all night and going to the gym in the morning, I went to the gym. The wrestlers who didn't go to the gym regularly let their vices get out of hand.

Q: The weight training gave you mental discipline.

A: Exactly, and it allowed me to go all-out in the ring. I took it seriously, probably too seriously. While everybody else was joking in the dressing room, I'd be watching my match from that night or the night before. For example, I never wrestled the same type of match twice in the same town. I'd try to give the

people a different match from what they had seen before. Of course, some guys have wrestled the same match every night for 25 or 30 years.

Q: Who did you talk to about getting into wrestling?

A: My father-in-law, who has passed on now, knew a bank president in Tampa who knew Eddie Graham. I asked him if he could contact Mr. Graham and see if he'd be willing to give me a tryout. That was the start of it all.

Q: Was Hiro Matsuda your primary trainer?

A: I trained with Hiro every day. He

put me through it every day, too. The interesting thing was that it was never assumed that I would be allowed back the next day. Each day, Hiro would say, "You can come back tomorrow."

Q: So you had to prove yourself every day. Who else helped you during those early years in Florida?

A: Bob Backlund was a big help to my career. He was a couple of years ahead of me and gave me lots of pointers on how I could improve what I was doing. I didn't talk a lot, but I had a quiet determination to succeed. I always wanted to be better than the other guy. I treated every match like I was fighting for my life. I was very aggressive, yet didn't know how to channel it. Like I said, it took me a few years to put it all together.

Q: Did you know any other football players who had become wrestlers?

A: Bruiser Brody, Tito Santana, and Stan Hansen come to mind. I think football helped give all of us a serious approach to wrestling.

Q: Stan Hansen played in the World Football League for a while. And you had a stint with the WFL as well, didn't you?

A: I was with the Jacksonville Sharks. It was a great situation because Jacksonville was only about an hour-and-a-half from home. But I tore an abductor muscle in my leg. It was over a year before I could run again. It was a devastating injury.

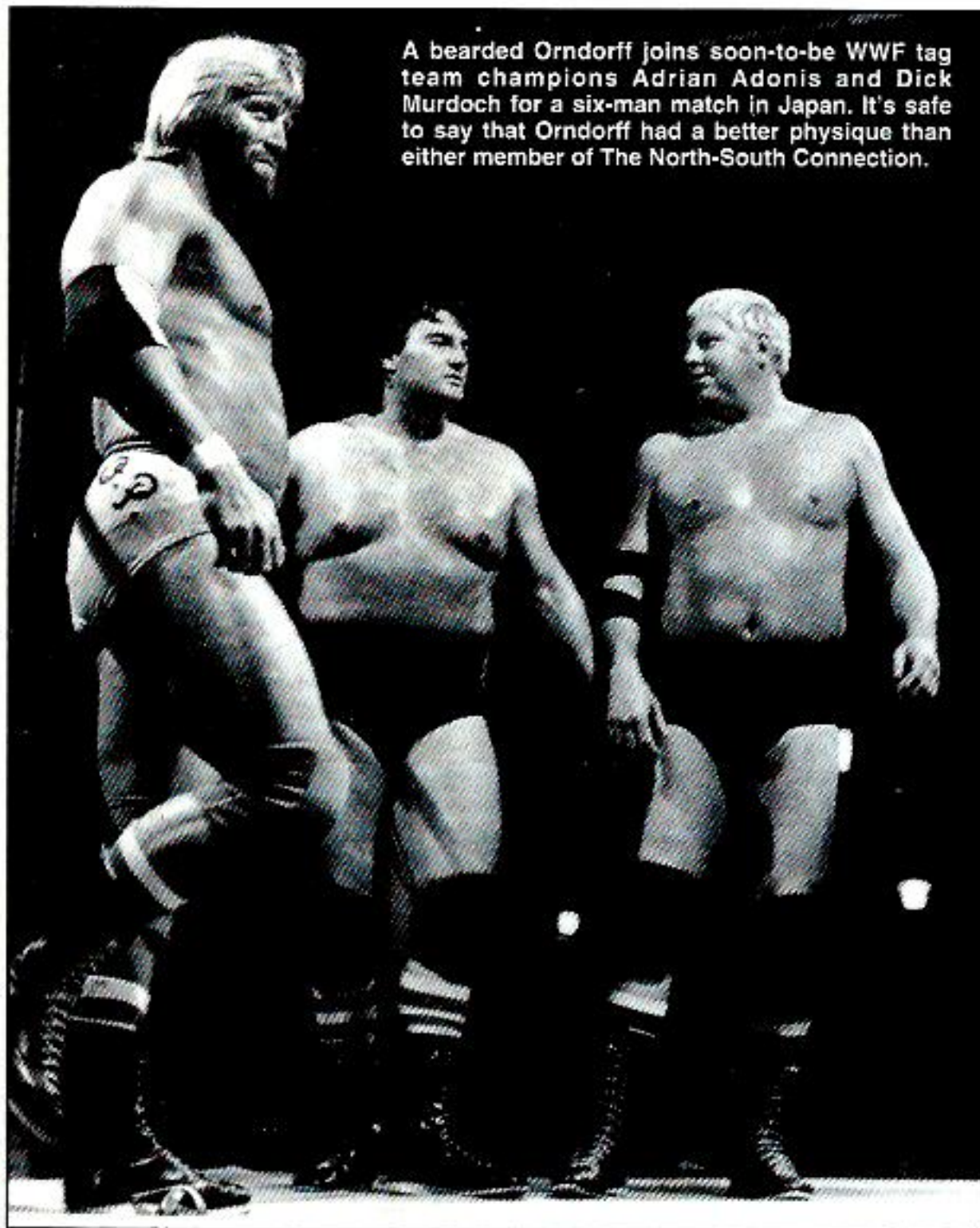
Q: What was the first angle or first series of matches that you had that made you feel like you were finally getting traction in the wrestling business?

A: My matches with Jerry Lawler in Memphis. I only had 10 matches in Florida before I went to Tennessee. I was there for a couple of weeks and an agent said, "Paul, you're working hard, but if you can't pick it up, we won't be able to keep you here." That was terrible news to me. The next night, with nothing to

“Down there in the Mid-South, I wrestled seven nights a week, and every night was a learning experience. No ... I didn't learn ... I was *taught* the wrestling business. Ernie Ladd was a tremendous help to me.”



A bearded Orndorff joins soon-to-be WWF tag team champions Adrian Adonis and Dick Murdoch for a six-man match in Japan. It's safe to say that Orndorff had a better physique than either member of The North-South Connection.



lose, I sort of blanked out and went on pure emotion and adrenaline. And that did the trick. It was like I had a cage around me, and I was afraid to try anything, and I suddenly felt like nothing was holding me back. I was mixing punches and forearms, selling like crazy, and got a big reaction from the crowd. That raised my confidence incredibly.

Eventually, I was wrestling in main events against Lawler.

Q: It sounds like that was the first night you were “feelin’ it.” You must have been accustomed to the regimented training of football, and you finally learned how to loosen up for wrestling.

A: I knew how to take pressure and gear it for the football field. The

coaches drilled us on our skills and the plays. I knew exactly what to do before I went out there. In wrestling, so much of it was improvisational and playing off the crowd. And every crowd was different. I had mastered the physical end, but not the mental aspect. When I finally learned that lesson, I was making over \$1,000 per week.

Q: That was nice money, especially back then. How did things work out for you in Louisiana?

A: Actually, I worked the Louisiana circuit off and on for three or four years. At that point, I was progressing nicely. People can say what they want about Bill Watts, but he did me right. We're both no-nonsense guys, and I appreciate straight talk. Down there in the Mid-South, I wrestled seven nights a week, and every night was a learning experience. No ... I didn't learn ... I was *taught* the wrestling business. Ernie Ladd was a tremendous help to me. He booked me in an angle with himself, and we had a hot run of matches.

Q: Being a former football player himself, Ladd probably appreciated the transition you were having to make to wrestling.

A: That's right. He believed in me and, from that point on, I was working on top. I love him. He's a good guy, and I'd do anything for

him. Ernie, Bill, that whole territory fit me like a glove at the time.

Q: When I first heard your name, you were wrestling in Georgia. And you were part of one of the most notorious angles of all-time in which Larry Zbyszko offered Killer Brooks \$25,000 if he could beat you for the National title, and then turn the title over to him. Of course, that angle had a lot of exposure because it took place on Ted Turner's WTBS, which had a national reach in those early days of cable. Were you aware

of how much exposure you were receiving?

A: Absolutely. Back then, if you could make it to Channel 17, Ted Turner's SuperStation, your career had the potential to skyrocket. Bill Watts was the first promoter to do the big dome shows, like the ones he ran at the Superdome in the late-'70s and early-'80s. Bill brought in Tommy Rich, and he was over with the fans instantly—and that was because of the exposure he received every week on Channel 17. If you were over on the

SuperStation, you were over everywhere.

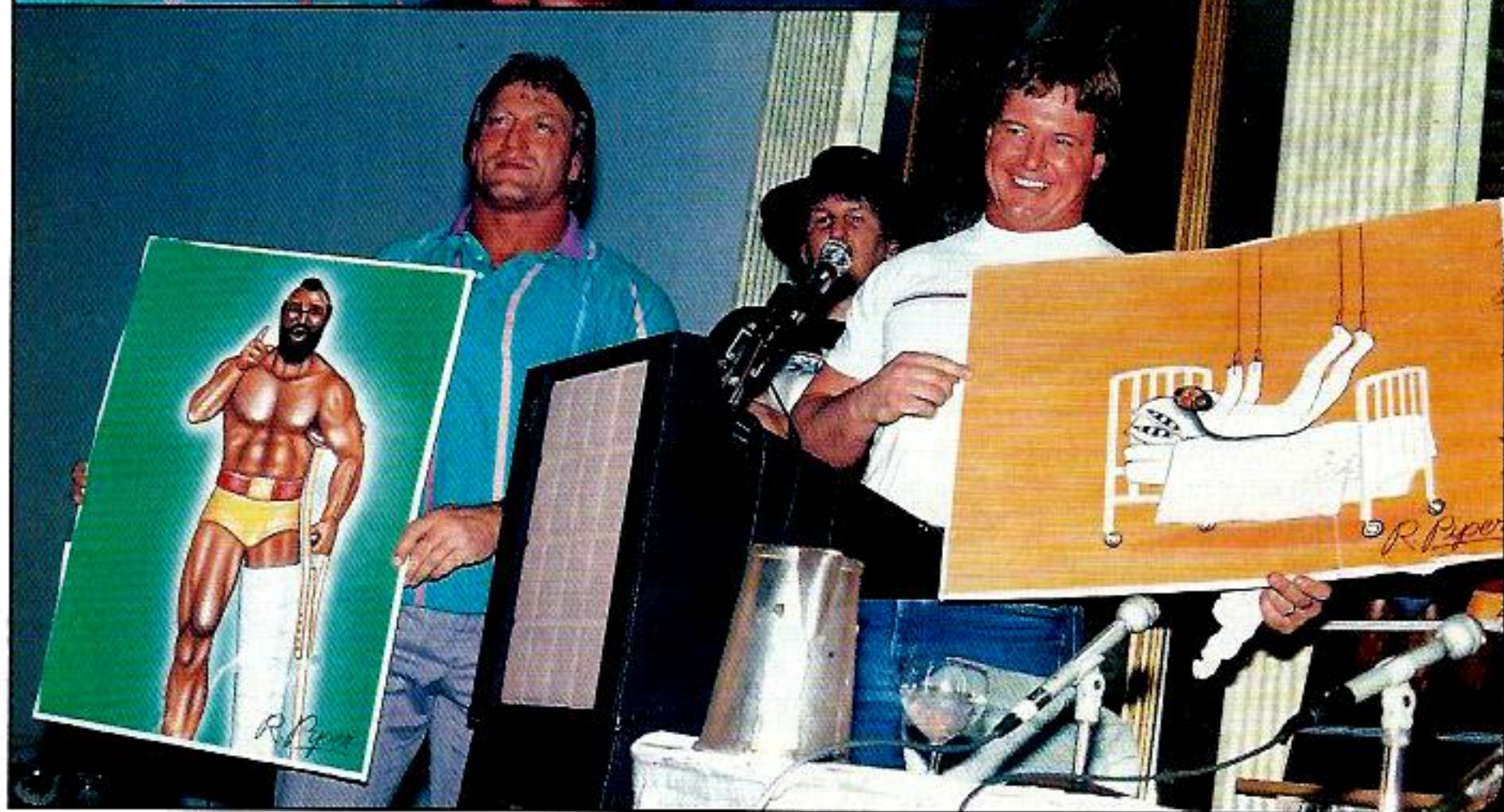
Q: How successful were those Superdome shows in the early days?

A: We had so many great matches at the Superdome. There was the match where I defended the North American title against Stan Hansen, and there was another where Junkyard Dog wrestled Michael Hayes. JYD was over huge in that territory, and it was common for us to draw over 30,000 fans.

Q: I suppose that even those Superdome shows helped you get noticed.

A: Yes, and I was starting to get a good amount of attention at that time. I remember working for Harley Race at a big show at the Checkerdome in Kansas City. I had an excellent match that night, and George Scott, who worked for Jim Crockett Jr.,

"Mr. Wonderful" enjoys his time in the limelight, and even boxing legend Muhammad Ali is impressed by the size of his biceps (left). Orndorff and Roddy Piper display artist renderings of what Mr. T would supposedly look like after their match against Mr. T and Hulk Hogan at the first WrestleMania (below).



I got a mule kick under the chin, and that's what did it. It was me and Bob Orton Jr. vs. Piper and Hogan in a tag team match in Toronto. Piper mule-kicked me under the chin. I wasn't very happy about it, and I'm still not.

benchpress and what I could squat, so I was a threat to Hogan. Whether it was Hogan or anybody else, I could blow my opponents up and get them to the point that they would damn near have to take a break, and that's when I started kicking butt. I had three different speeds in the ring, and my slow speed was faster than some guys' fast speeds.

Q: I recall the speed and intensity that you brought to the ring. In particular, I remember your stomps in the corner, which is something that Steve Austin became known for.

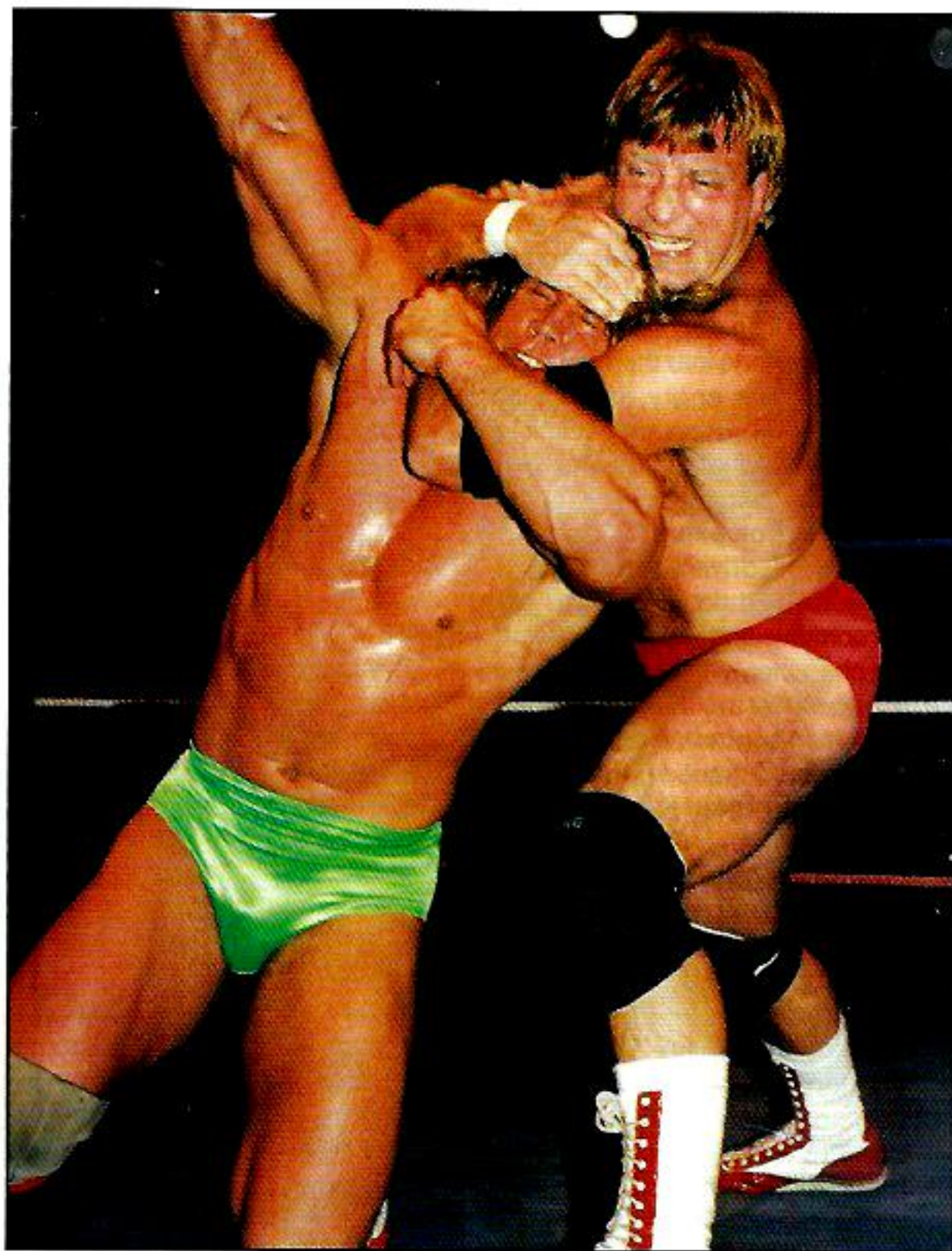
A: Who do you think told him about it? We were good friends at the time he left WCW. When he was thinking about going to the WWF, I told him that he would have to be aggressive there. The fans hadn't seen sheer aggressiveness in quite a while, and it would make him stand out.

Q: Up until the mid-'80s, the WWF definitely believed in a "less is more" philosophy.

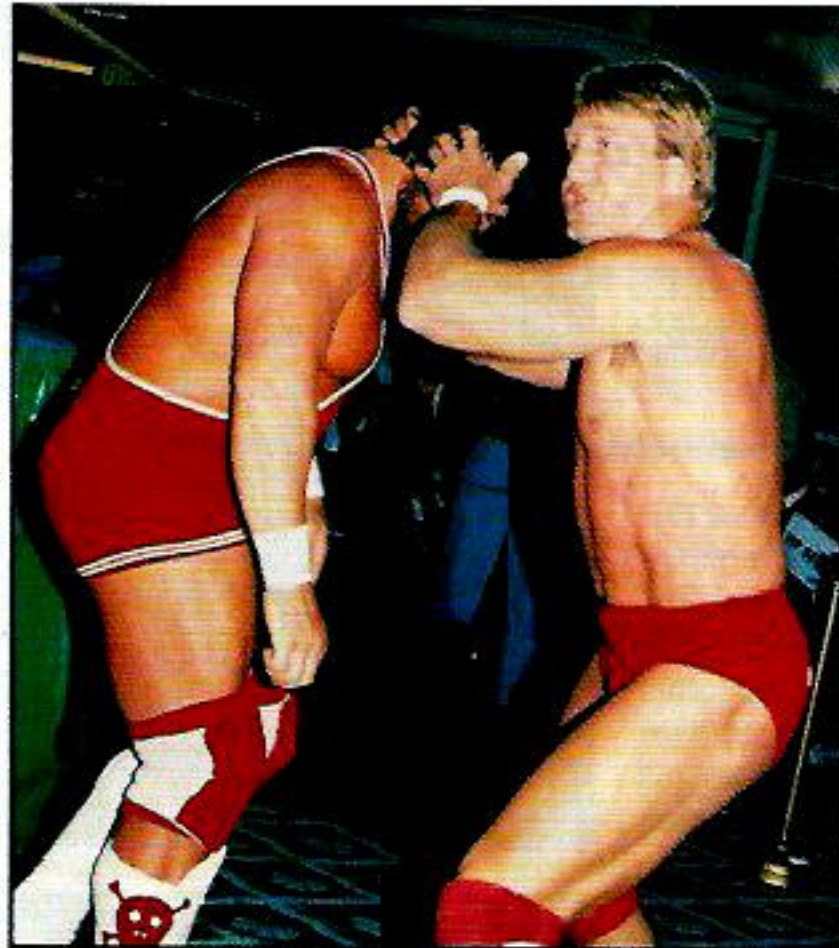
A: That's right. And the WWF succeeded not so much because Vince was a genius, but because he had the best talent in the history of the business. He recruited the best talent from the top territories in the country—and that's a farm system that doesn't exist anymore and probably never will again. Those wrestlers knew how to do TV and how to get themselves over.

Q: That also provided the WWF with a wide variety of ring styles. Today, all the talent comes from the same developmental system. How much do you think that has hurt wrestling?

A: Today, new wrestlers have tattoos or no tattoos. They're either long-haired or bald-headed. There's nothing to distinguish one from another. The matches seem mechanical because there is no ring psychology and they all do the same moves. A match



"Mr. Wonderful" missed most of 1987 due to his neck injury and took another hiatus before returning in 1989. He would spend the next few years on the indy circuit, and even faced Kerry Von Erich in a well-publicized match.



As a central star of Herb Abrams' UWF in the early-1990s, Orndorff often battled "Dr. Death" Steve Williams. Although the promotion didn't last long, it landed television deals on several cable outlets and even ran a pay-per-view, titled "Beach Blast."

should be like a book, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Today, so little attention is paid to getting the fans into the match, or making them angry, happy, or sad. When a scriptwriter is telling you exactly what to say, it's hard to let your own personality come through. For example, when I said I'd piledrive somebody, I'd make sure I'd do it. That was my personality and in keeping with my character.

Q: It seems to me that your second run against Hogan, after you turned heel against him, was even hotter than the first. The two of you drew over 70,000 people to that great house show at Exhibition Stadium in Toronto. That was an amazing number for an event that was not a pay-per-view or hyped on TV. In fact, the success of that event convinced Vince McMahon that Toronto would be a good place for WrestleMania VI. How do you explain the success of that event?

A: What do you think those people were paying to see? A title

change! If Vince had put the belt on me at that time, I would have had an unbelievable run, and Hogan and I—and Vince—would have made even more money. If I had won that belt, and if Hogan had somehow regained it from me, he would have become an even bigger star. But that didn't happen. If you think somebody can't be beaten, why are you going to come out and watch it? When Mike Tyson was knocking out everybody, the pay-per-views started dropping. Why pay

to see Tyson knock everybody out in two or three rounds? When he started going rounds with Evander Holyfield, that's when he made money—when the fans thought he could be beaten.

Q: It may be hard for younger fans to realize your star-power at that time. Hulk Hogan was undeniably the number-one guy, but I would say that Randy Savage and Paul Orndorff were neck-and-neck for that number-two spot. But, looking back in history, it appears that Savage was the bigger star because he had a run with the title. How much did that lack of a title run hurt your career?

A: It hurt ... a lot. Randy was a decent worker, but he was all showbiz. And so was Hogan, unless he had the right person to work with.

Q: What was the major difference between you and Savage in the ring?

A: I never planned a damn thing in the ring. That was a major

difference. I went totally on instinct. Hogan and I never planned anything. I never even went to the same gym with him. We just did it.

Q: Didn't you injure your neck and arm during your run with Hogan? How did it happen?

A: I got a mule kick under the chin, and that's what did it. It was me and Bob Orton Jr. vs. Piper and Hogan in a tag team match in Toronto. Piper mule-kicked me under the chin. I wasn't very happy about it, and I'm still not.

Q: I can imagine. Did you finish the match? What were you like afterward?

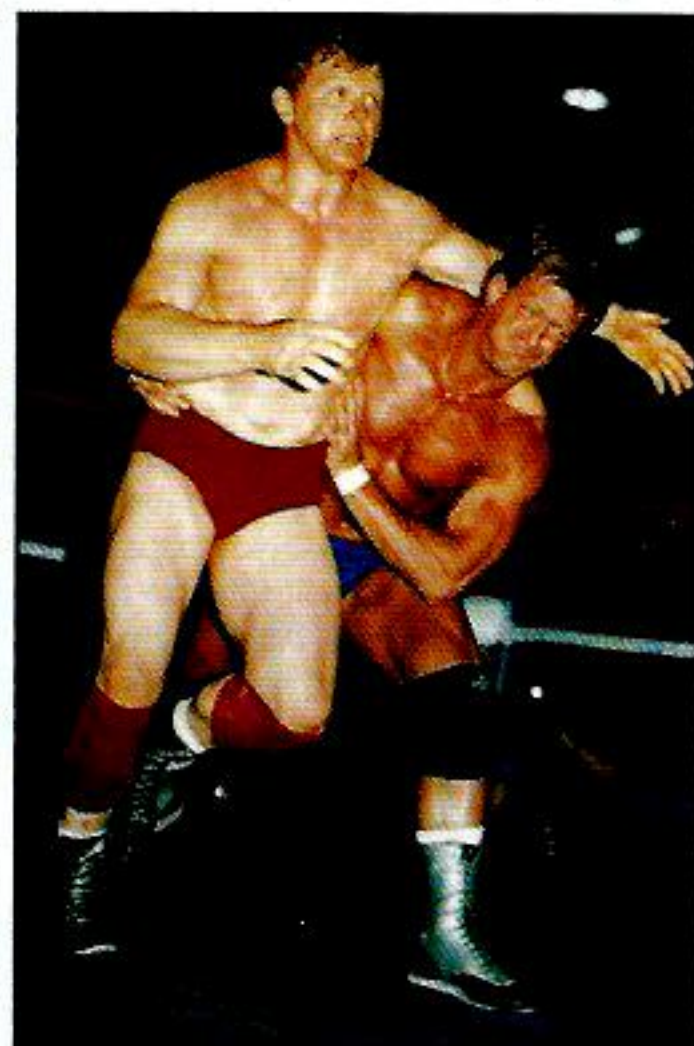
A: Yeah, I finished the match. But, after that, it was all downhill.

Q: Did you know something was seriously wrong at the moment it happened?

A: Oh, God, are you kidding? A vertebrae collapsed on my nerve. That's why, today, my whole right side is practically dead.

Q: Did you take any time off?

A: When you're making \$25-, \$30-



Orndorff whips Bob Backlund across the ring during this 1992 indy match. "Mr. Wonderful" hadn't wrestled Backlund since he first entered the WWF in late-1983. He credits the former WWF champion with helping him during his formative years in Florida.

"I don't think that even Vince knows the whole story. He probably thinks I left the WWF in an unprofessional way. But he doesn't know the pain I went through ... I had tears in my eyes because the pain was so bad."

grand per week, you don't take time off. I made a mistake. I should have had surgery right then, and I might have got some of it back. But I chose not to. I chose the tough-guy way, to gut it out. People don't realize how devastating that injury was to me. The next day, I went to the gym and couldn't bench-press 25 pounds.

Q: That must have been heart-breaking for you.

A: *Heartbreaking?* I still suffer from it to this day. All the work I had put into my career, and the pain I endure to this day, was because of somebody's mistake. Was it intentional? It might have been. I just have to take control of myself, take a deep breath, and let it go.

Q: Were you diagnosed right away?

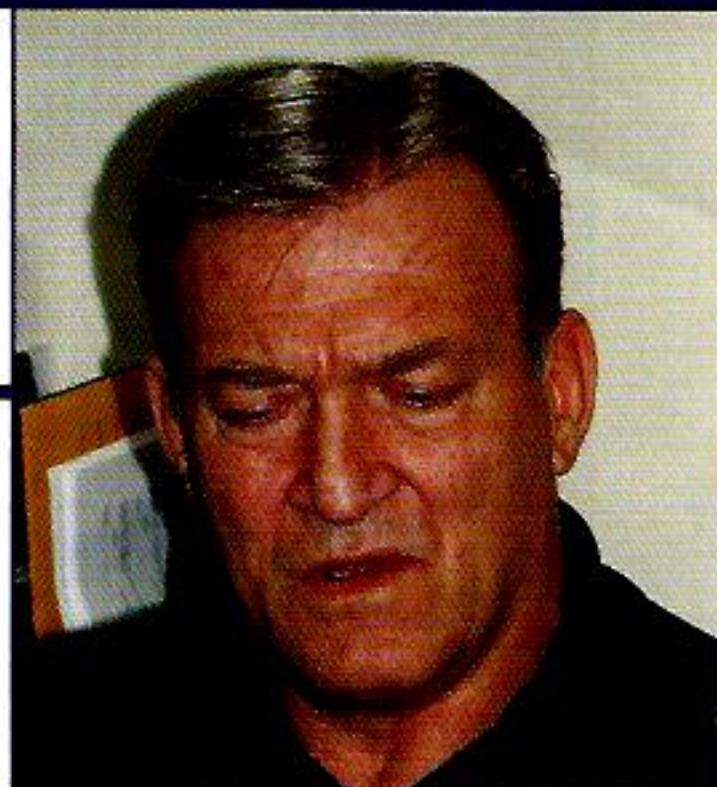
A: Yes, but I was afraid to have the surgery. I was in a position where I was making a lot of money and thought I could make enough to get the hell out of the business. Getting your neck cut on 20 years ago wasn't the same as now. I was petrified, because I had never been cut on before. It was a bad decision. When you play ball and get a scratch, you tell the trainer. In this business, if you don't work, you don't get paid.

Q: Of course, Bill Goldberg gave Bret Hart a mule kick that ended his career. But the difference is that injury occurred to Bret near the end of his career, and you were at the peak of yours.

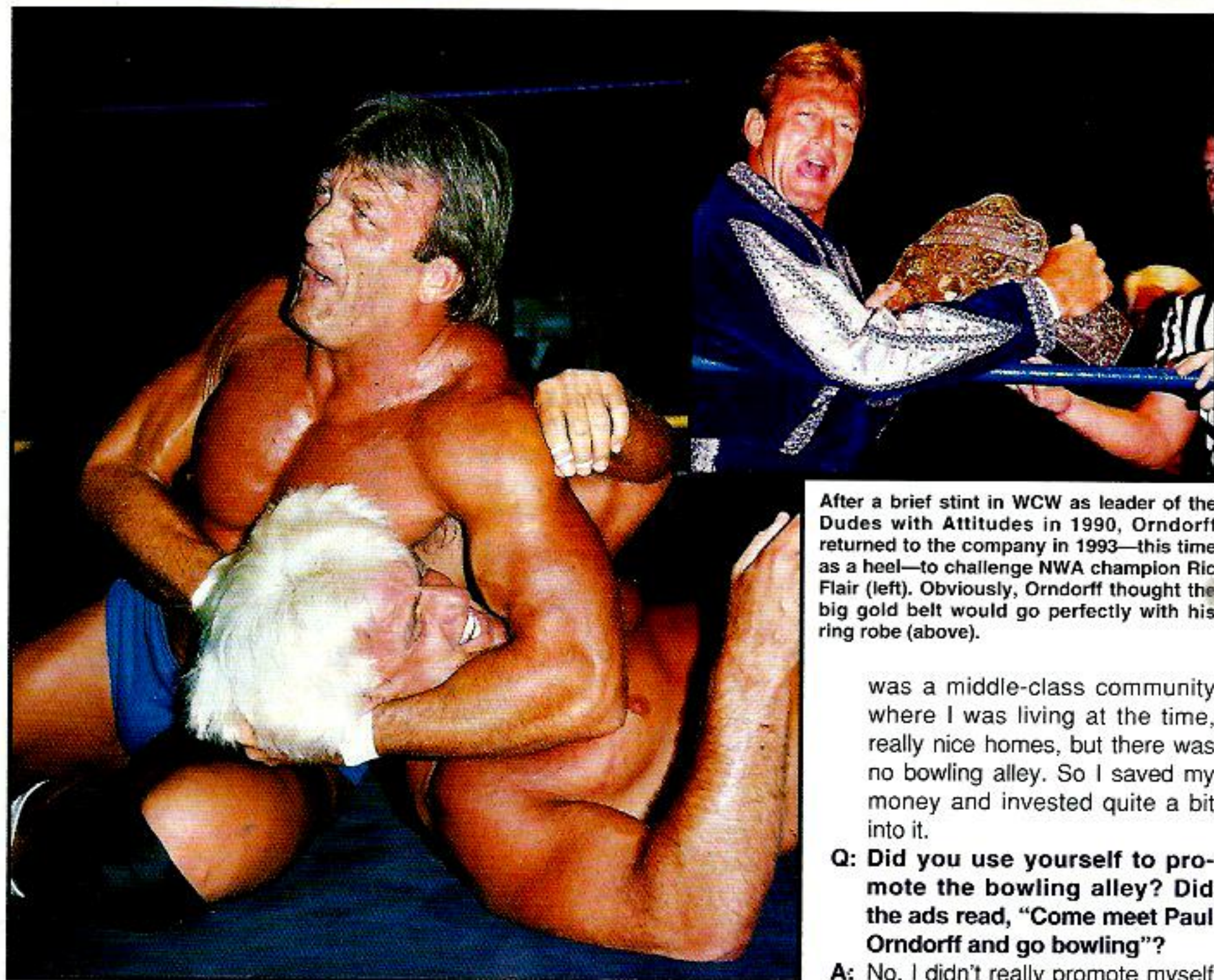
A: Exactly. You're reading it just the way it was.

Q: When I was a fan during that

era, insider news wasn't as prevalent as it is today, so I didn't realize that your injury was as serious as it turned out to be. I had no clue that the effects were becoming progressively worse over time and the degree to which you



The American Wrestling Federation champion grants an interview to announcer Chris Cruise in 1992. Orndorff put together a solid career on the indy circuit between his WWF and WCW stints. AWF matches actually consisted of rounds, similar to the old British system.



After a brief stint in WCW as leader of the Dudes with Attitudes in 1990, Orndorff returned to the company in 1993—this time as a heel—to challenge NWA champion Ric Flair (left). Obviously, Orndorff thought the big gold belt would go perfectly with his ring robe (above).

were hiding that injury in the ring. How did you readjust your training?

A: Harry, if you only knew how *mental* that injury was to me. Wrestling was everything to me. That injury affected me, my family, and it hurt me very much financially—all because of some idiot's mistake. It shouldn't have happened. I try to forgive as best as I can, but it's caused me a lot of hell.

I don't think that even Vince knows the whole story. He probably thinks I left the WWF in an unprofessional way. But he doesn't know the pain I went through. After some of my matches, I had tears in my eyes because the pain was so bad. I've had three major surgeries on my neck. And, still, I can't raise

my right arm more than five inches from my waist. My arm basically just hangs there.

Q: How did you cope with that injury in the ring?

A: I just overcame it to an extent, but it took a lot out of me. I had to use my head more than my body, and I didn't have quite the same style. I had to be real careful with my neck, so I wasn't as wild in the ring. I still had the intensity, but none of it was easy.

Q: Isn't it true that you opened a bowling alley at about this time, as a way to perhaps ease out of the wrestling business?

A: I was always told that if you ever go into business, go into something that you enjoy and know something about. I love bowling, and I practically grew up in a bowling alley and skating rink. It

was a middle-class community where I was living at the time, really nice homes, but there was no bowling alley. So I saved my money and invested quite a bit into it.

Q: Did you use yourself to promote the bowling alley? Did the ads read, "Come meet Paul Orndorff and go bowling"?

A: No, I didn't really promote myself that much. The newspapers around here loved the idea, partly because the bowling alley was owned by a famous wrestler, but it was also popular because I chose not to have alcohol. I wanted it to be a place where parents could come with their kids. I enjoyed it. But the business started to get complicated, and I'm not a complicated person. So, I got out from under it and I got another opportunity to work for Turner. They had already made me an offer, a huge contract for me to come in as a heel, and I turned it down. That was another mistake I made.

Q: Why did you turn it down the first time?

A: I didn't want any more of the wrestling business. I was tired of it. I did accept a job, helping with

“[Big Van Vader] sucker-punched me and knocked me into some boxes. I hit him one time and knocked him out and kicked him about six times in the face. His face looked like a busted watermelon.”

the booking, and I was there for about a year, and it went nowhere.

Q: Wasn't this about the time that you an infamous run-in with Big Van Vader?

A: You never knew what side of the bed that Leon [White] was going to wake up on. He had been asked two or three times to do an interview before we taped our TV show in Atlanta. He wouldn't do it. Two or three people were sent to speak with him. Finally, Kevin Sullivan asked me to tell

Leon to hurry up and do the interview. I went into the locker room and Leon was sitting down. I asked him to do the interview. He took offense. I explained that I was one of the agents and that I was just doing my job. I told him that if he didn't do the interview, that I would have to tell Eric Bischoff. He started cursing. Then we exchanged words and it just got hotter and hotter. He sucker-punched me and knocked me into some boxes. I hit him one time and knocked



him out and kicked him about six times in the face. His face looked like a busted watermelon. They took him to the hospital, and I wasn't hurt at all. That's how it happened.

Despite his amazing run in the WWF, Orndorff never held championship gold there. He didn't have that problem in WCW, where he enjoyed a five-month reign as TV champion in 1993 (left), and—after forming Pretty Wonderful with “Pretty” Paul Roma—“Mr. Wonderful” was co-holder of the World tag team title on two occasions in 1994 (below).



Q: That clears up the situation a bit.

A: I don't know why he was in such a bad mood. He had just signed a \$2.3-million contract. I just did what Sullivan instructed, and I did it in a nice way, a professional way. Leon just flipped out. Well, it backfired on him.

Q: So, you left WCW for a while, but it wasn't long before you returned to run the Power Plant.

A: I had mentioned to them that I'd like to run a training school. And, about six to eight months later, some Turner executives said they'd like me to run their training school. And, as far as I'm concerned, it's the best school there's ever been. Turner did it right. They gave me every tool to make it a success.

Q: I've never known a training school to get so much mainstream publicity.

A: Let's face it. That's because I was running it. We had *20/20* and everybody else coming to do stories on us. That school was called "the Harvard of Professional Wrestling" for a reason. I was a damn good instructor because I love people who want to listen. There were a lot of eager kids who wanted a chance. My problem was breaking the news sometimes that they weren't going to make it. If a guy walks in and weighs only 135 pounds, it's not gonna happen. I hope they forgave me for being honest with them. Everybody thinks they can become a wrestler, but they can't.

Q: How much of the Hiro Matsuda method did you apply to those students?

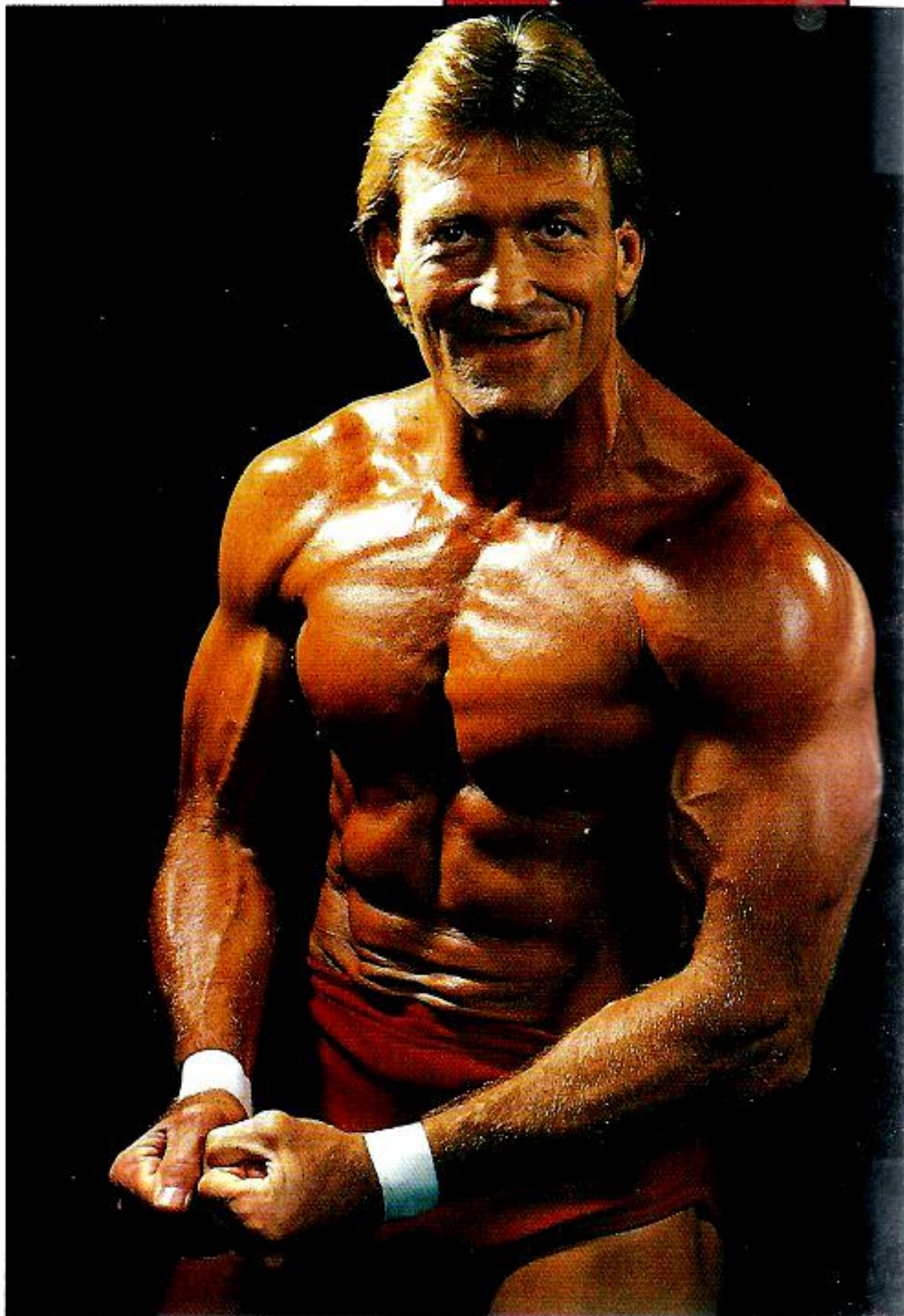
A: I worked those kids hard because I had to make sure they were committed to it. I put them through hell. And I had some notable guys there, too, like Bob Sapp and Goldberg. No matter who they were, I made sure they busted their butts, got some pride, and got their bodies right so they could go for an hour. There's nothing worse than wrestling and being so tired that

you're seeing stars. Your cardio is the most important. When you start to get tired, you need the ability to kick it in and take it to an even higher level.

I was proud that the Turner people showed so much confidence in me. They authorized me to go as high as \$75,000 when offering training contracts. Plus, I had good people—such as DeWayne Bruce—working for me.

Q: Of course, he's better known as Sgt. Buddy Lee Parker with

Although Orndorff's neck injury was taking its toll, causing the right side of his body to atrophy, his physique was still impressive in the mid-1990s (below). Nevertheless, Orndorff couldn't avoid major surgery (right).



“I’ve been through a lot in my life, and that gives me empathy for other people. And I respect my elders. Young people should listen to their moms and dads. Even now, I love to sit down and just talk to an older person.”

The State Patrol. Who were some of your best students?

A: Goldberg. Unfortunately, his career wasn’t handled right. I would also count Chuck Palumbo and Sean O’Haire. All of those Natural Born Thriller kids were good. They had the potential to be main-eventers because they were big guys and had charisma.

Q: You made a comeback of sorts in 2000, when you joined Terry Funk, Arn Anderson, and Larry Zbyszko in the Old Age Outlaws. You actually found yourself in the ring against some of your students.

A: And that’s what finished me off physically. I didn’t want to get back in the ring, but I was pressured into it. I should have said no. During a match on pay-per-view, I lifted one of the young guys into a piledriver, but he made the mistake of not holding his legs out straight into the air. He let his legs fall back into kind of an “L.” That caused me to lose my balance and damage my neck even further. In some ways, that injury was worse than the first one.

Q: From listening to your story, it sounds as if you can’t be a success in life without taking risks, and some of those risks are going to leave you with regrets. Do you regret becoming a wrestler.

A: Absolutely not. I loved the interaction with the fans, whether I was a good guy or a heel. Do you know what two things made money in the Depression?

Q: Wrestling and prostitution?

A: No, I mean legal professions.

The answer is wrestling and insurance. Insurance was popular during the Depression because people were worried about financial security. Wrestling, the drama of the one-on-one fight, is always going to appeal to the masses. For a certain phase of my life, I was glad to be a part of it.

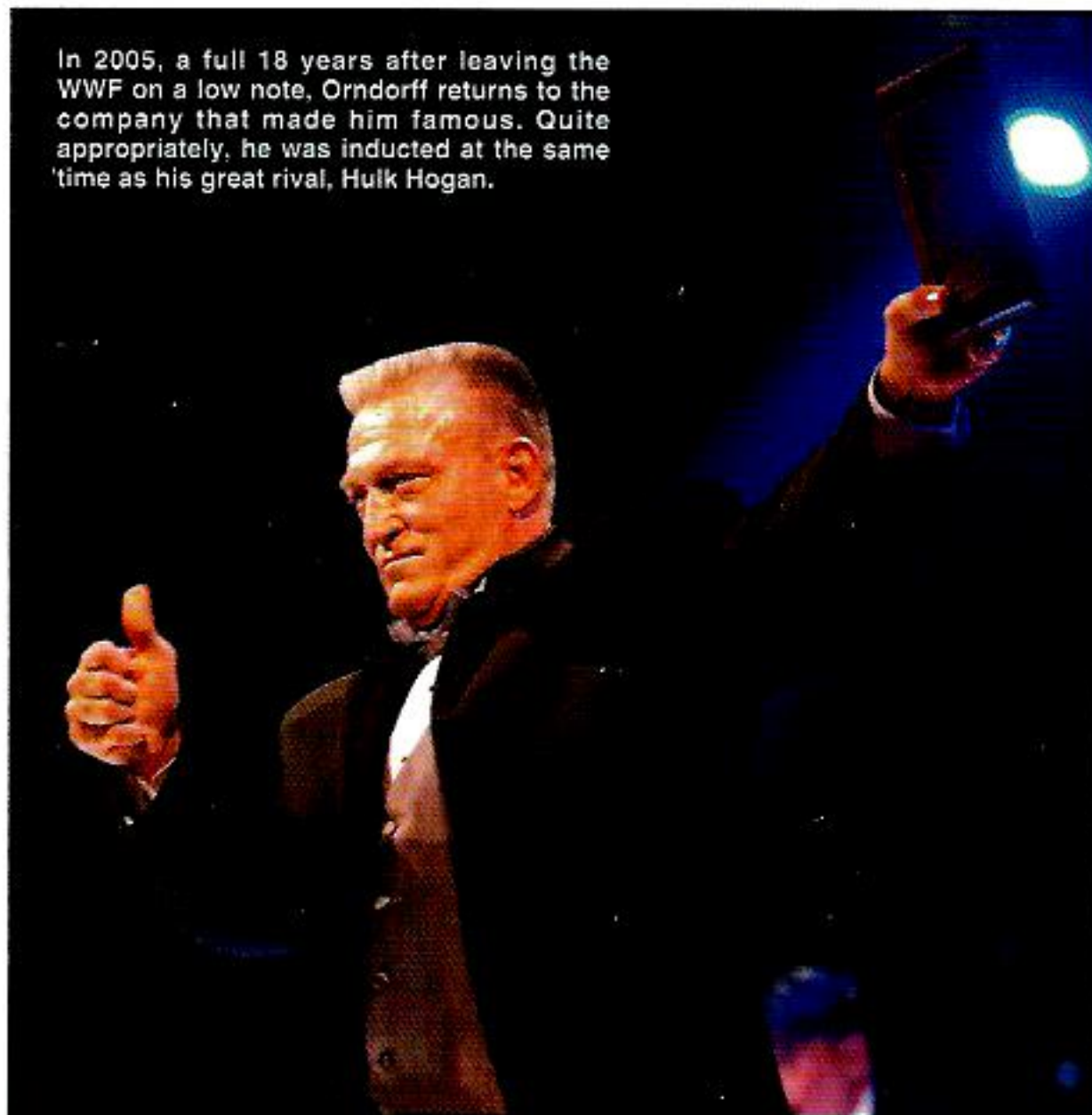
Q: One final question: What makes Paul Orndorff so wonderful?

A: I’ve been through a lot in my life, and that gives me empathy for other people. And I respect my elders. Young people should listen to their moms and dads.



Even now, I love to sit down and just talk to an older person. They have wisdom that we don’t rely on nearly enough. Life isn’t about your profession or so-called fame, it’s about what’s in your heart and how you relate to those closest to you. I’m just a country boy who loves my family deeply. □

In 2005, a full 18 years after leaving the WWF on a low note, Orndorff returns to the company that made him famous. Quite appropriately, he was inducted at the same time as his great rival, Hulk Hogan.



WRESTLING'S
EXTREME



MAKEOVER

Underground Wrestling
Meets Music Television



MTV has changed a lot since the days of Michael Jackson, Madonna, and Cyndi Lauper. But how will fans of *The Real World*, *Cribs*, *TRL*, and *Rob & Big* react to wrestling that is complete with mosh pits, trampolines, thumbtacks, and live music? Are MTV viewers ready for Wrestling Society X?

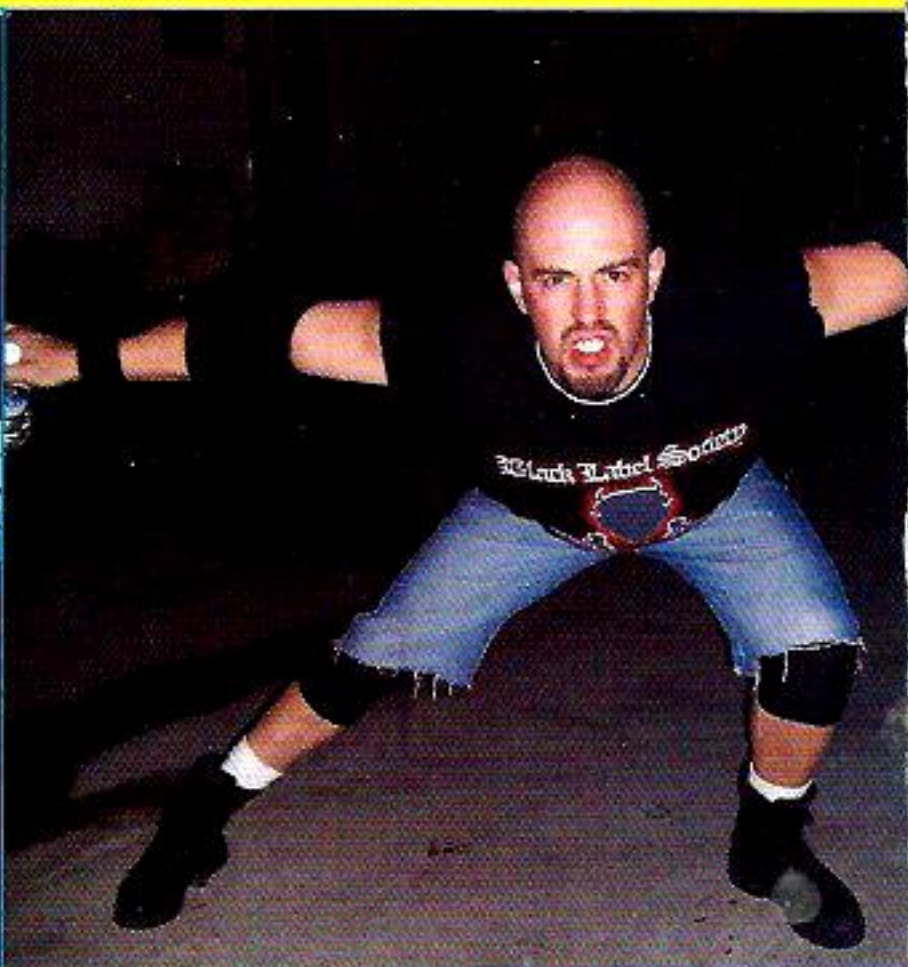
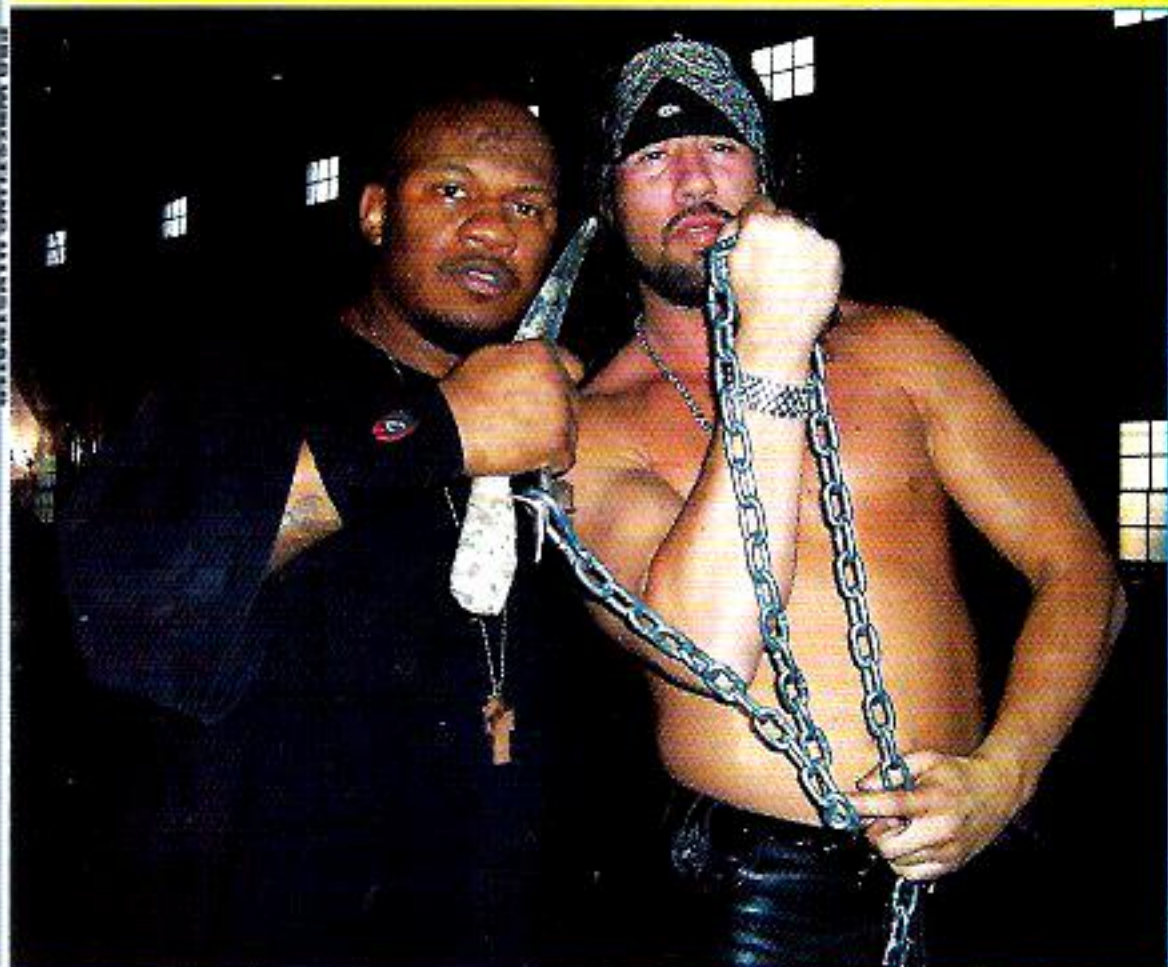
By Dan Murphy

A LITTLE OVER a year ago, word got out that the head honchos of MTV were looking to create their own wrestling promotion. Check that. It's not a "promotion," in the traditional sense of the word. There are no plans to tour or to really compete with other regional promotions of a similar size. It would be more of a wrestling television show—a hybrid of wrestling show and reality show, featuring competitors who are just as likely to have a *Surreal Life*-style meltdown in front of the cameras as they are to put on incredible matches inside the ring.

Some of the sport's most talented—and eccentric—names signed on the dotted line. New Jack, whose troubles with the law are as well-publicized as his insane suicide dives off balconies, came aboard, as did Teddy Hart, whose exploits seem to earn two enemies for every one fan he makes.

Photos by Mike Lano



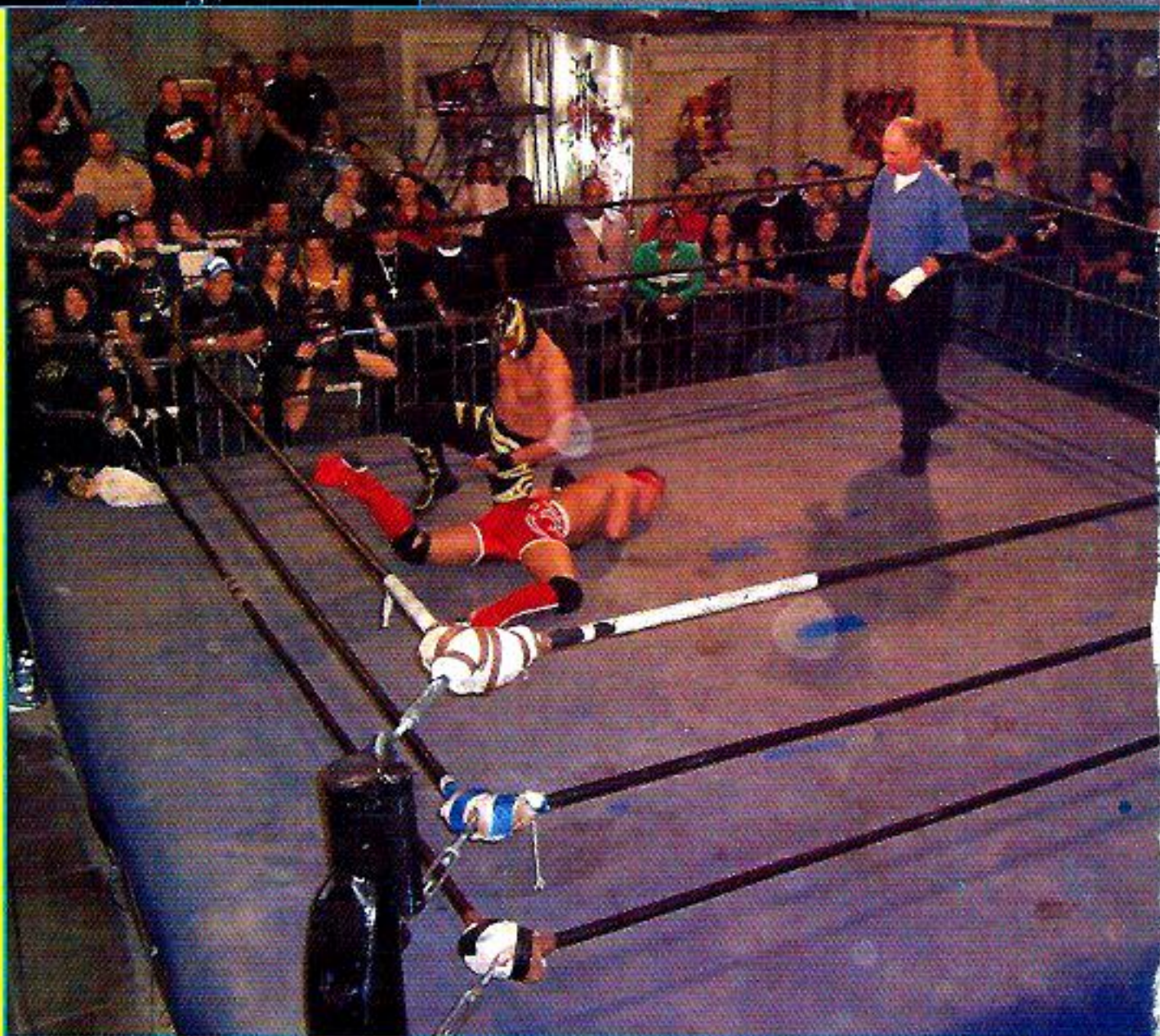


Chains, mosh pits, and shanks—now *that's* hardcore! Perhaps MTV knows more about what extreme fans want than even Vince McMahon. WSX represents a great opportunity for wrestlers such as New Jack and Sean Waltman (above).

There is also Vampiro, who has never been shy about speaking his mind, which has lost him his job on more than one occasion, and the notorious Sean Waltman, whose train-wreck lifestyle was immortalized on that infamous edition of *The Surreal Life* when he tried to get on—again, off—again lover Joanie Laurer off the show.

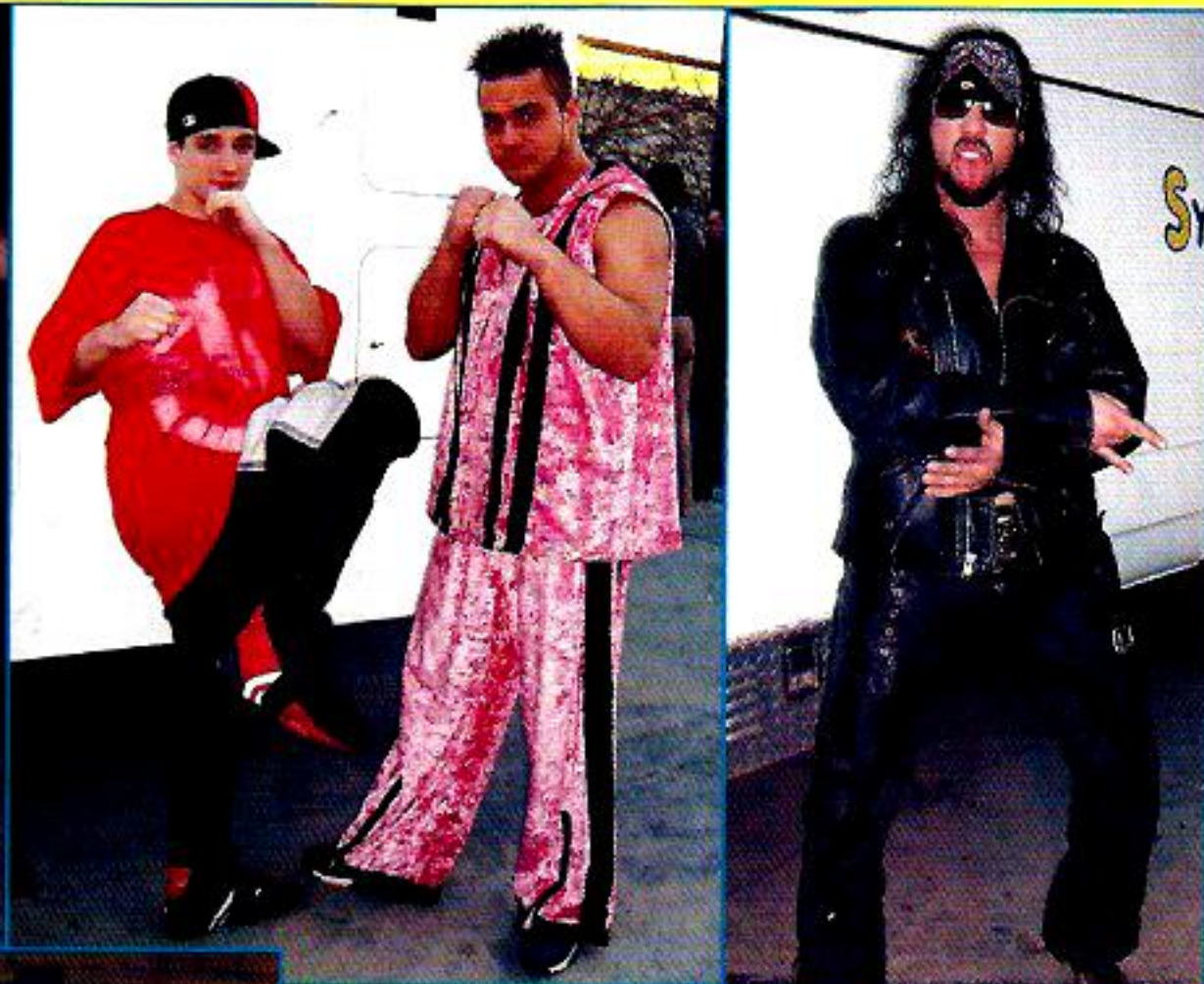
New Jack, Hart, Vampiro, and Waltman are four of the most controversial wrestlers in the sport today, but no one can deny their incredible in-ring skills. Of the three, Hart is the only one who has yet to be exposed to a national audience, and his wicked corkscrew planchas, 450-splashes, and moonsaults have made him an underground sensation.

But Big Vision Entertainment, the producers of the new made-for-TV promotion, dubbed Wrestling Society X, did more than rely upon a handful of controversial veterans to create their start-up company. They recruited some of



With a set that resembles a rundown warehouse complete with peeling paint and scaffolding, MTV is setting the stage for a wrestling program on which truly anything could happen. But let's hope they don't try any pyrotechnics in that place.

the most exciting names on the independent circuit, cherry-picking the most fearless high-flyers from across North America. Ring of Honor sensation Jack Evans signed on,



The concept of Wrestling Society X finally came together with the signing of some of the industry's most talented names, including former DXer Sean Waltman (above right), Justin Credible (above left), and Teddy Hart and Jack Evans (above center).



Rumble," a match that saw tables, chairs, chain-link trampolines, and even a high-voltage box with an electrical charge used as weapons.

In between matches, former Ozzy Osbourne guitarist Zakk Wylde and his band, Black Label Society, rocked the house with a live performance that had fans up and

as did 2005 Super 8 tournament finalist Puma, ex-ECW champion Peter Polaco (formerly known as Justin Credible), 2006 Ted Petty Invitational Tournament winner Matt Sydal, and cult favorites Altar Boy Luke and Human Tornado.

In February 2006, Wrestling Society X taped its pilot episode. The producers put all of the combustible pieces in place, and then created an intentionally stripped-down look and feel to firmly differentiate Wrestling Society X from WWE and TNA. A beaten old practice ring with ragged turnbuckles was set in a tiny studio, which was filled with a mixture of rabid wrestling fans, handpicked models, and camera-friendly beautiful people. The taping featured three bouts as Human Tornado defeated Puma, Evans defeated Sydal, and Vampiro and Waltman secured WSX contracts in an insane "WSX

2007. The first season of shows was taped in mid-November 2006.

In a news release, MTV promised WSX will be "the greatest, dirtiest, and most dangerous sports entertainment program that throws the glam out of wrestling and piles on the grappling action every week."

"Each week on Wrestling Society X, the most talented warriors the world has ever known will battle each other and their surroundings, creating an experience that will alter viewers' lives irrevocably."

"Alter viewers' lives irrevocably?" That's a heady promise for a promotion that has existed largely on paper for the past year. And, on a network where Justin Timberlake, Fergie, and the Pussycat Dolls are tops and the biggest conflict is who's messing around with someone else's significant other, how many viewers will be willing to tune in at all? Will extreme high-flying wrestling win over the *Jackass* fan set, or might it attract wrestling fans who might not otherwise watch MTV at all?

The answers to those questions are largely out of the wrestlers' hands, but there's a very real feeling of excitement among the WSX wrestlers.

"Our obligation is to wrestle as hard as we can and put on the best show in wrestling, and that's what we're going to do," Hart said. "When people see what Teddy Hart can do—when they see what Vampiro and Jack Evans and Matt Sydal and everyone else can do, people's jaws are going to hit the floor. Mark my words: WSX is going to be the hottest thing in wrestling—and the hottest thing on MTV—in 2007." □

moshing around the stage.

"I've been to a lot of wrestling shows, but I've never seen anything quite like that show," reported Justin Goodrich, who attended that first taping in Southern California. "It was a pure adrenaline rush—like a Mountain Dew commercial come to life inside a wrestling ring. There were only three matches, but I left there with my throat hurting from cheering so hard, and I just felt physically exhausted. It was unbelievable."

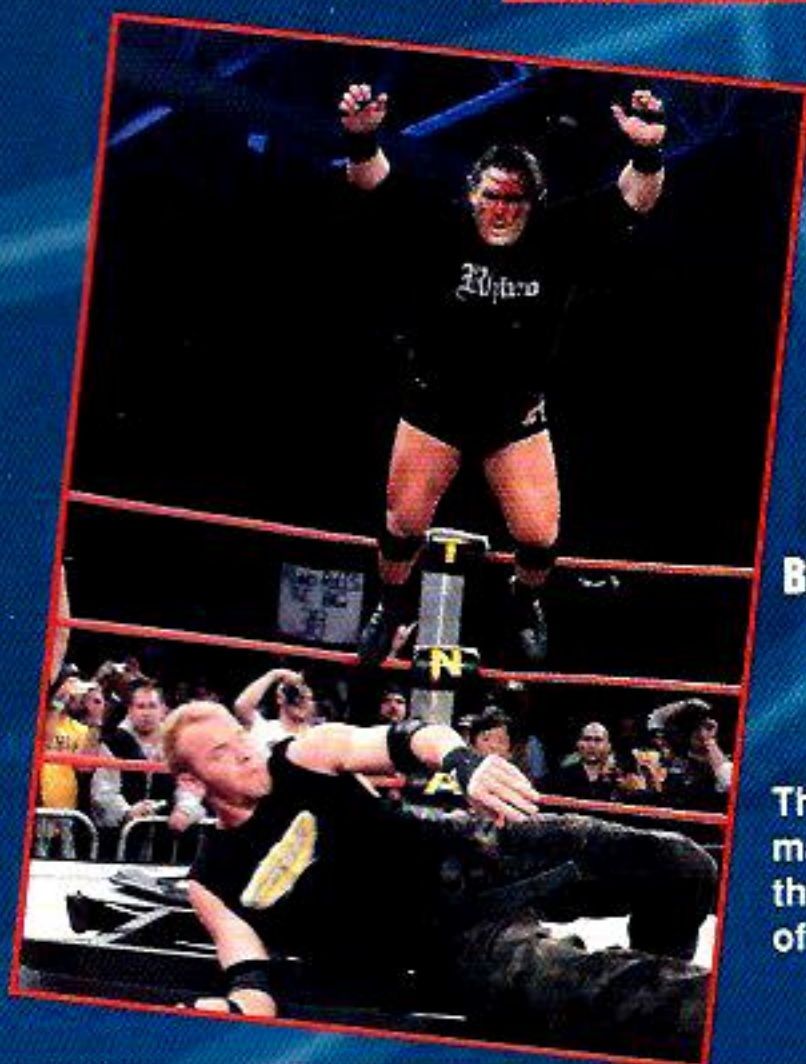
For the past year, the wrestling world has taken a wait-and-see attitude toward the project. Despite the buzz that first taping generated, WSX still had to get a green light from the executives at MTV—a difficult challenge considering the teeny-bopper friendly fare and soap opera standards that currently make up the bulk of the network's programming.

But, on December 14, 2006, MTV officially announced that Wrestling Society X had been approved and would debut at the beginning of

SNORTING

MAD!

HOW A SECRET PACT WITH
CHRISTIAN AND EDGE TURNED
RHINO INTO A MADMAN!

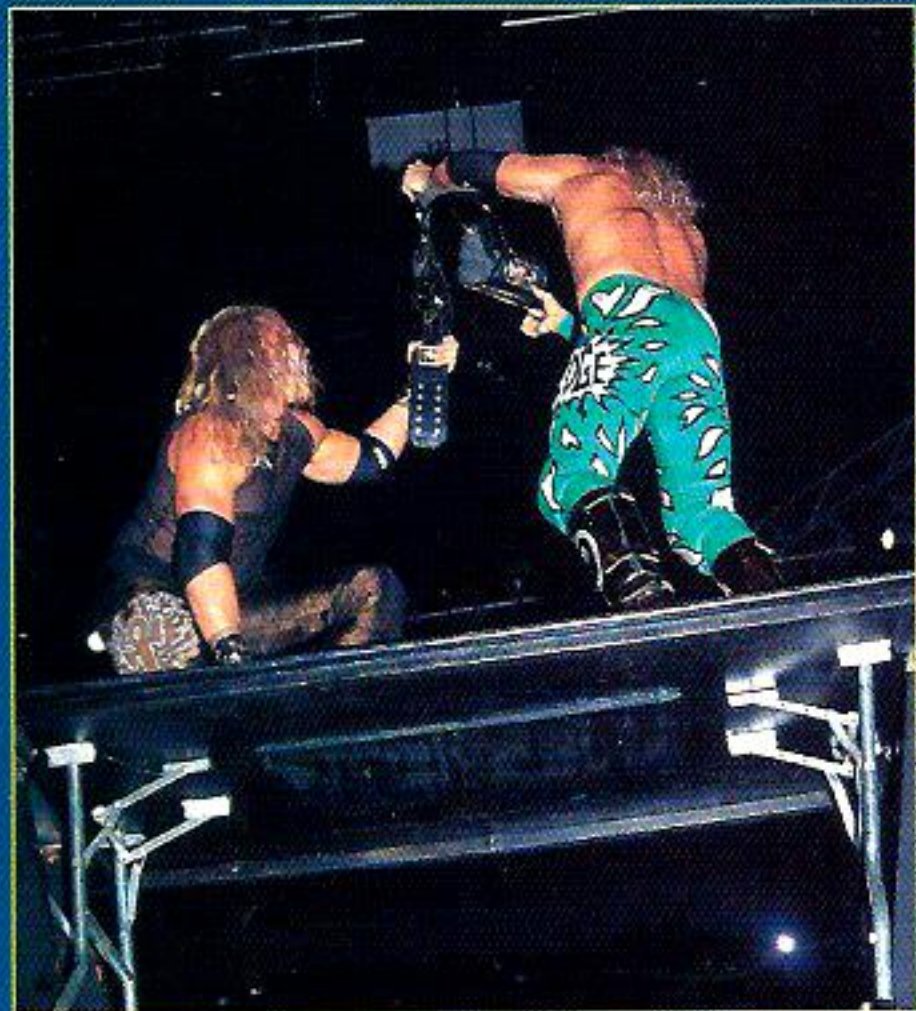


Why was Rhino surprised when Christian Cage recently turned against him? After all, he had already seen what Cage had done to Edge and Sting. But Rhino thought a pact would protect him. *He was wrong.*

By Jake Black

DEEP INSIDE THE bowels of an arena, within the confines of a dimly lit locker room, three shadowy figures sat on a bench. The three members of Thug Life had emerged victorious in another hard-fought match. Not all of their wins were necessarily pretty, but they were quickly emerging as the most promising group of wrestlers on the Toronto-Detroit independent scene.

Sitting in a small huddle, the young men put their hands



A friendly pact between friends once guaranteed Rhino, Christian Cage, and Edge would always watch each other's backs. This same pact allowed Christian and Edge to reach their common goal and attain the WWF World tag team title.

was, unfortunately, a naïve belief on the part of the former NWA champion.

Edge and Christian abided by the pact for many years. They joined the WWF together, long before Rhino made the jump. They not only won several tag team championships together, but also set a standard for extreme tag team matches during

their historic TLC matches with The Hardy Boyz and The Dudley Boyz. Edge and Christian were like brothers, just like Christian and Rhino were.

In 2001, Rhino signed with the WWF and joined Edge and Christian. Five years after the faction's heyday, Thug Life was back together—in spirit, if not in name. The reunion was short-lived, however, as Rhino was lured into the WCW/ECW Alliance while Edge and Christian remained affiliated with the WWF.

At the time, Christian felt left out. Rhino had rejoined the extremists while Edge received a major singles push, winning the King of the Ring tournament. Christian felt these two men he loved as brothers had broken the pact. Fueled by professional jealousy, Christian turned against Edge and set out to make his own mark on the industry. Rhino, so focused on making a name for the

short-lived Alliance, was oblivious to Christian's actions, but it was too late by that point. In Christian's mind, the bond among the former Thug Lifers was irretrievably broken.

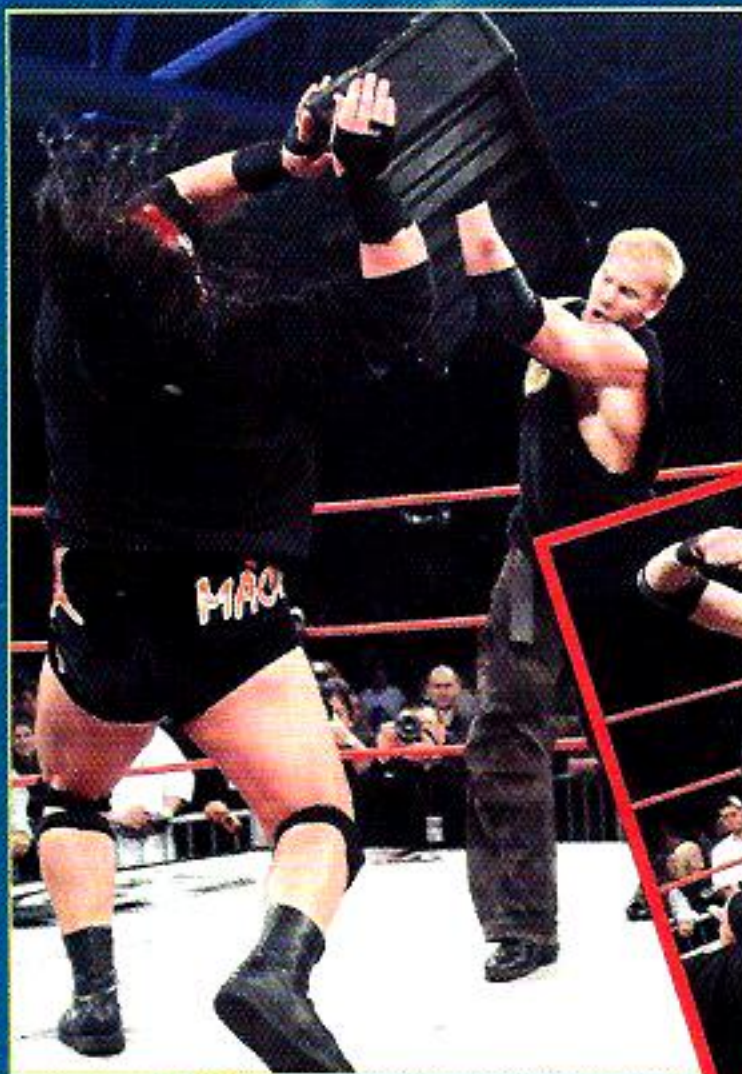
Like a shattered family, Edge, Christian, and Rhino went their separate ways. Each man was successful, but it was a struggle for each man to reach his full potential without the other two. While Edge was working toward the Raw World championship, Christian was sent to Smackdown, where he was primarily a talk show host.

Rhino, in the meantime, endured several personal trials that led to his eventual departure from WWE and his arrival in TNA.

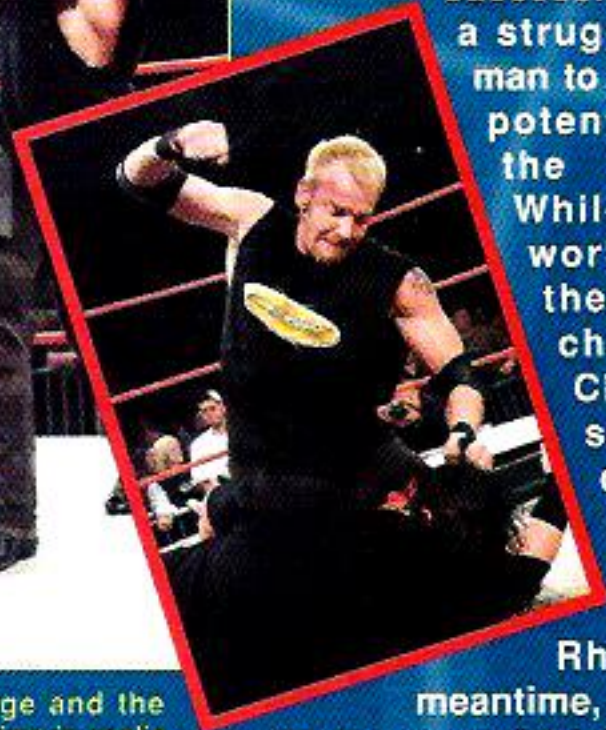
together and made a pact. The members of Thug Life would always be true to one another. They would always ensure that they had one another's backs. They were a team for life. On that day, more than a decade ago, Christian Cage, Rhino Richards, and the future "Edge," Sexton Hardcastle, swore an oath that their loyalty to one another would last eternally.

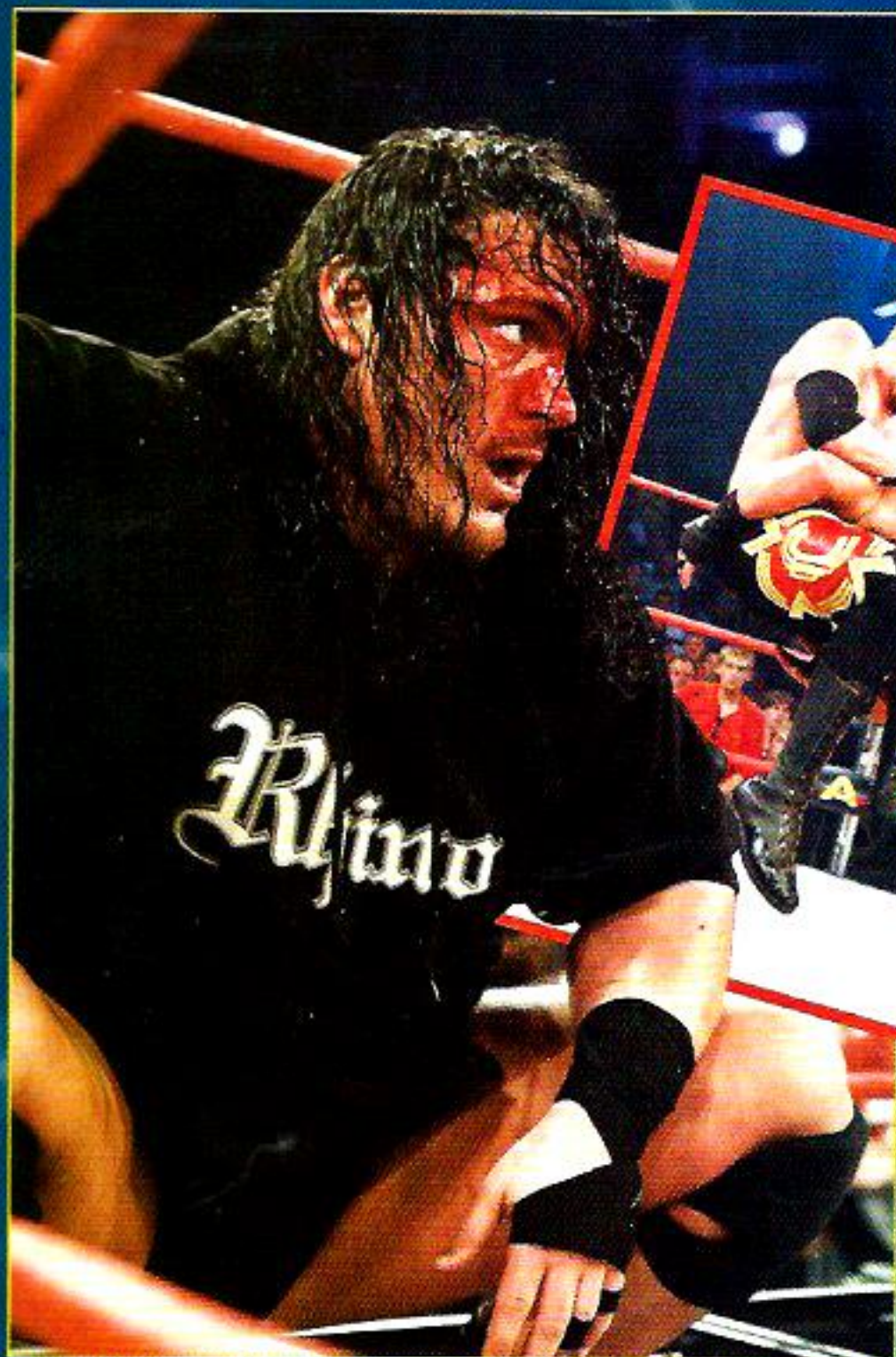
That oath has since been broken ... and that violation has driven Rhino to the brink of madness.

Why would the members of Thug Life believe their pact would last? In wrestling, loyalty is rare, and friendship is fickle. Perhaps it was the deep personal relationship these men, particularly Rhino and Christian, shared outside the ring. Recent video footage on *Impact* has demonstrated how close these men were. Their families were even friends. Maybe that was why Rhino never truly believed Christian would turn against him. It



Christian later turned against Edge and the pact they made as friends. Now Rhino is realizing that even he isn't safe from his former friend's backstabbing ways. Christian's brutal assault on Rhino proved he has no conscience.





Rhino isn't taking Christian's sudden change in character sitting down. For the first time, Christian is finding himself on the receiving end of a "Gore" (above right). Cage is surely having second thoughts about breaking that pact.

With Edge on Raw, Christian on Smackdown, and Rhino in TNA, they lost touch with one another. Edge won the Raw World championship and Rhino took the NWA title. As in 2001, Christian was the odd man out again.

In late-2005, Christian looked at his options. He was miserable in WWE, but saw that his old friend, Rhino, was succeeding in TNA. Perhaps jealous of his friends' success, Christian turned down more money from WWE and joined TNA. He and Rhino quickly renewed their friendship. Christian had, after all, turned against Edge, not Rhino. Rhino celebrated when Christian won the NWA World championship. He thought their pact was still in place. But, several months later, Rhino discovered the fallacy of this belief.

When Christian turned against Sting, Rhino confronted his lifelong ally. If Christian could betray Sting so easily, would Rhino be next? He

respected and trusted Christian. But was Christian worthy of that respect and trust? Rhino had to face the cold reality: He could not trust Christian, pact or no pact.

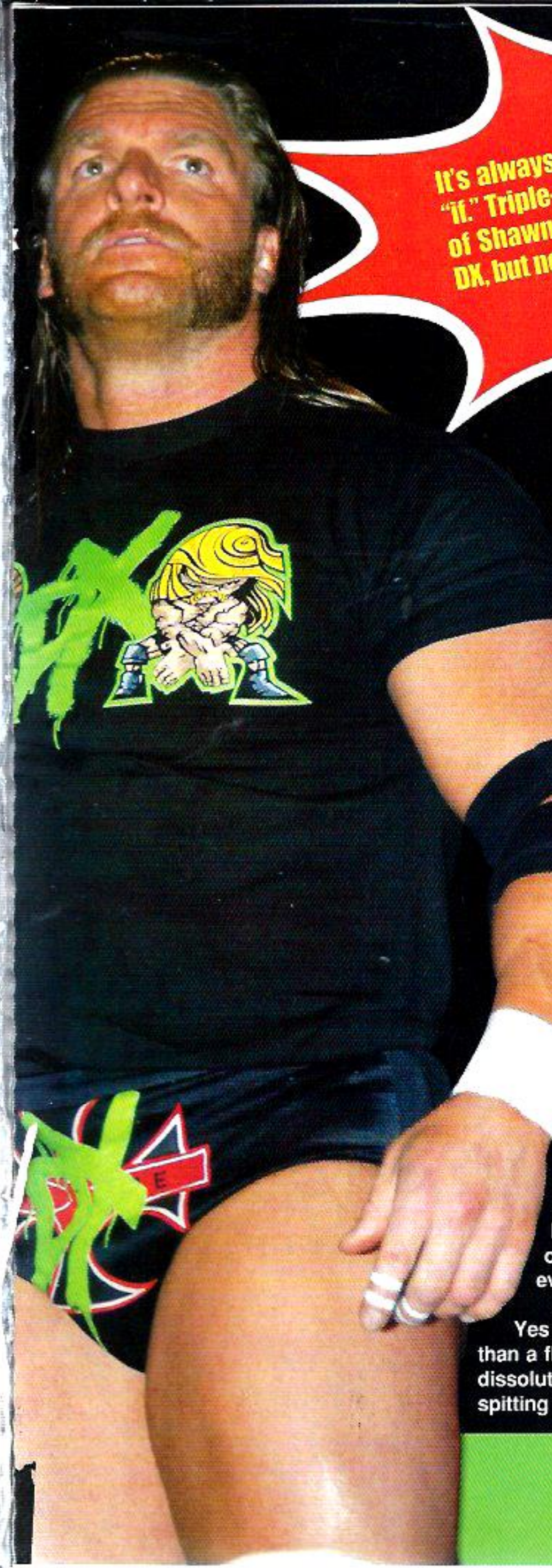
Rhino questioned Christian in the middle of the ring on *Impact*. Christian made excuses for why he turned against Sting, but didn't try to win the argument. In fact, Christian already knew what he was going to do. After Rhino had his say, Christian—not out of frustration, but almost casual calculation—blindsided the "War Machine" and went on to batter him a steel chair.

Rhino had been double-crossed before. Heck, even Rhino had double-crossed people before. It's all a part of the wrestling business. But it was different this time. Something inside Rhino snapped. He became consumed with the urge to hurt Christian.

His blind rage was evident during his showdown with Christian during their "Six Sides Of Steel" barbed wire match on *Impact's* prime time premiere. He gored Christian through the cage, giving his friend-turned-enemy the win. And he has since launched a crusade to make sure younger wrestlers understand the importance of trust in the wrestling business. That explains his interest in A.J. Styles, who recently had a falling-out with former partner Christopher Daniels. Styles has made clear that he doesn't want Rhino's help, even accusing Rhino of wanting something from him. Rhino's motives, however, are pure. He doesn't want Styles and Daniels to hate each other. He doesn't want the wrestling business to destroy another friendship pact.

Perhaps Rhino invested too much into a pact made over a decade ago in a small, dingy locker room. This investment has nearly destroyed him emotionally, threatening to derail his career. Can he rise above this emotional challenge?

Or has Christian's conniving betrayal worked to perfection? □

A photograph of Triple H (Paul Levesque) from the waist up. He is wearing a black t-shirt with a green and yellow DX logo. He has long brown hair and a beard, and is looking upwards and to the left. His right arm is resting on his left thigh, and he is wearing a black elbow pad and a white wristband. The background is black with a large red starburst graphic.

It's always been a question of "when" rather than "if." Triple-H might have been planning his betrayal of Shawn Michaels even before they reunited as DX, but not necessarily because he hates him

By Dave Lenker

THE LITTLE THINGS tell you a lot. In preparing you for the inevitable Triple-H turn against fellow sophomoric DX rabble-rouser Shawn Michaels, we offer

you the following two subtle clues:

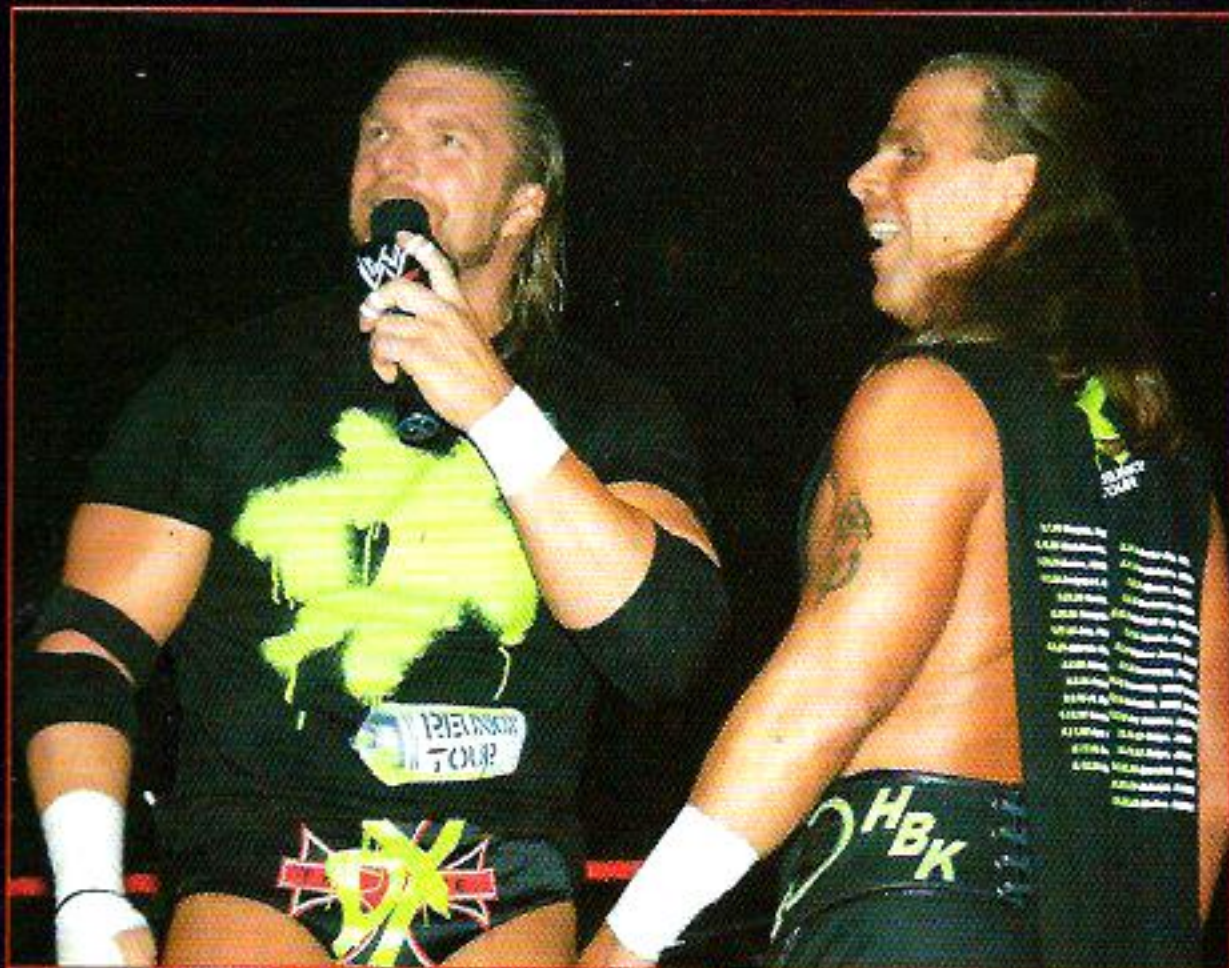
1. Remember WWE's recent taping of Raw in England in November? Trips grabbed the microphone, as usual, to offer a Michael Buffer impersonation that was a lot funnier and hipper a decade ago. "And now," he bellowed, "for the thousands in attendance here tonight and the millions watching at home ... I got nothin'."

What he meant, as he quickly explained to Michaels and those thousands of guffawing Brits in attendance, was that he couldn't come up with a snappy line to add before finishing with "Llllllet's get ready to ..."

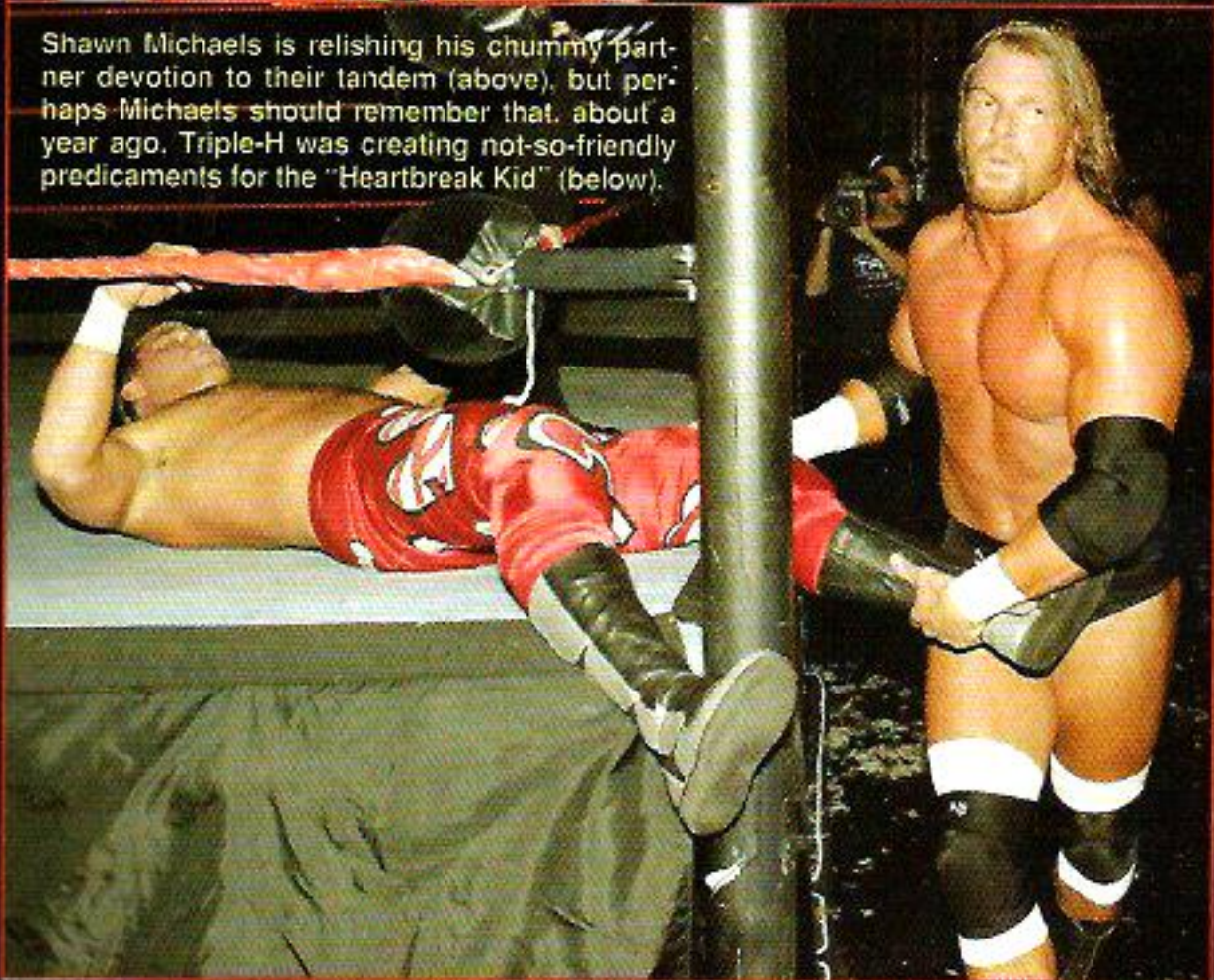
The wacky DX duo yukked it up as Hunter admitted it was a lot of pressure to come up with new material week after week (go ahead and insert your own joke about how *all* the DX comedy material is old). Sure, this was an amusing and easily forgettable little DX bit, but conspiracy theorists might suggest that this was a hint that even Triple-H was growing tired of doing the DX thing, perhaps even growing weary of sharing the spotlight with the "Heartbreak Kid."

2. Exhibit number two was presented to us on the first Monday in December. A week after Randy Orton and Edge all but slaughtered DX associate Ric Flair, Triple-H and Michaels weren't doing much smiling, laughing, or mischief making. The promos were all serious. The two men were angry and focused—sneering even. They wanted revenge, plain and simple.

Just a typical reaction to a cowardly assault on a friend? Yes and no. It was an expected reaction, but we got more than a fleeting glimpse of the Triple-H we grew to hate since the dissolution of the previous version of DX: the ultra-serious, fire-spitting "Game" who was always ready for battle. We hadn't seen



Shawn Michaels is relishing his chummy partner devotion to their tandem (above), but perhaps Michaels should remember that, about a year ago, Triple-H was creating not-so-friendly predicaments for the "Heartbreak Kid" (below).



that Triple-H for a while, had we? In fact, we hadn't really seen him since he was mired in a championship slump that started when Batista trampled him at WrestleMania 21 on April 3, 2005. Come to think of it, that slump has continued to this very day.

Hmmmm ... "Cerebral Assassin," indeed.

With WrestleMania 23 looming, it's easy to forget that Triple-H has lost in three consecutive WrestleMania main events—and it has been nearly two full years since the Raw World title belt has adorned his waist. That DX reunion last summer came at a convenient time for Hunter, didn't it? It allowed him to step

out of the Raw World title mix without looking like he was doing so out of necessity. It gave him a chance to refresh, regroup, refocus, and rededicate himself to regaining the gold in due time.

Naturally, DX was going to be high on Raw cards. And was there any doubt he and Shawn Michaels were going to dominate a feud with the overexposed McMahons?

When the time was right, he could take aim for the title again, and he'd seem fresh in that spot again. Don't think "The Game" didn't hear all the talk about the DX reunion likely to work only in the short term, if at all. Heck, that's all he needed it to last.

Memo to HBK: Your good buddy Hunter isn't such a good buddy after all. We only hope you've known that all along.

Triple-H waxing nostalgic for the good ol' days of DX? Please. He's been looking forward to better new days all along.

Yes, "Cerebral Assassin," indeed.

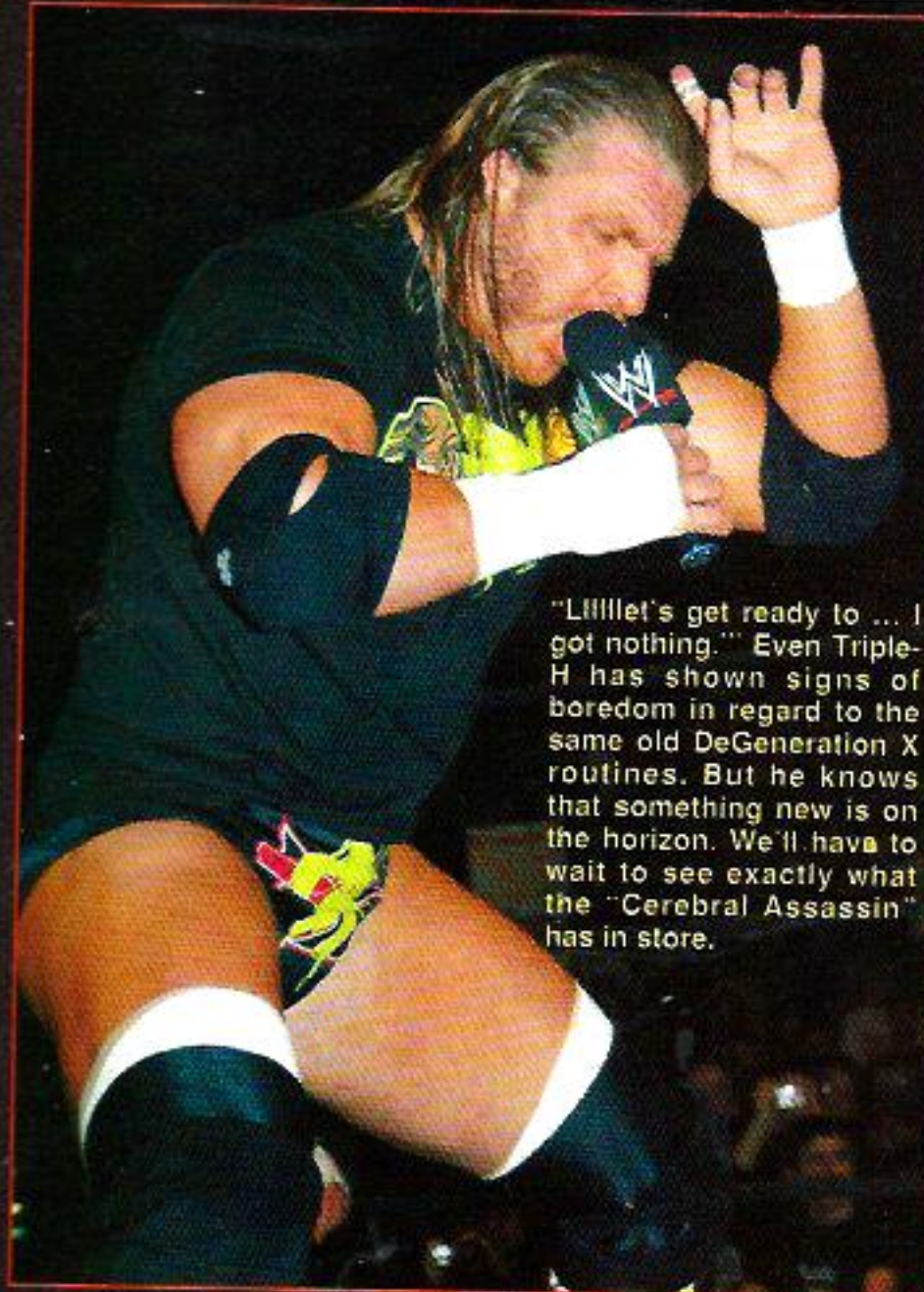
So the bottom line about Triple-H is that he is one of the most untrustworthy, despicable, selfish, backstabbing, heinous no-good-niks in the sport today, if not the history of the sport, right? It's that simple, easy, and straightforward.

Not so fast.

As bizarre as it may seem to compare Triple-H to golf's Tiger Woods, it makes sense in a way. Woods will probably be remembered as the greatest golfer in history by the time he is through. Triple-H will not likely be remembered as the greatest wrestler in history,

even if he moves into Vince McMahon's plush office in WWE headquarters and is named WWE chairman someday. But he so desperately would like to be.

Nonetheless, it cannot be argued that Triple-H, like Woods, isn't one of the elite in his sport. Wrestling, like golf, is about individual accomplishments. Woods is known to seek every possible competitive advantage he can. "Cerebral Assassin" might be an appropriate nickname for him as well. One of his most formidable weapons on the golf course is not a custom-made three-iron (or even a trusty sledgehammer) he can pull out of his golf bag at just the right time. No, it's psychological warfare.



"LLLLet's get ready to ... I got nothing." Even Triple-H has shown signs of boredom in regard to the same old DeGeneration X routines. But he knows that something new is on the horizon. We'll have to wait to see exactly what the "Cerebral Assassin" has in store.

Once Woods has hammered his first tee shot into the center of the plush fairway, he ceases talking to his playing partners. He has a number of friends on the PGA Tour, but once the game is on, it's all business. This is especially important in the last round of a tournament, as Woods tends to be in the lead or close to it, and that means his playing partner is the man closest to him on the leaderboard at the outset of the round.

Think about it. You're playing with the best there is, and you're lucky if he says two words to you (and no, not *those* two words) the whole time you're on the course, even if you're a good friend off the course. Friends be damned. That's how focused and driven he is. What a wonderfully subtle and passive form of intimidation, don't you think? That's how important being the best is to Tiger Woods.

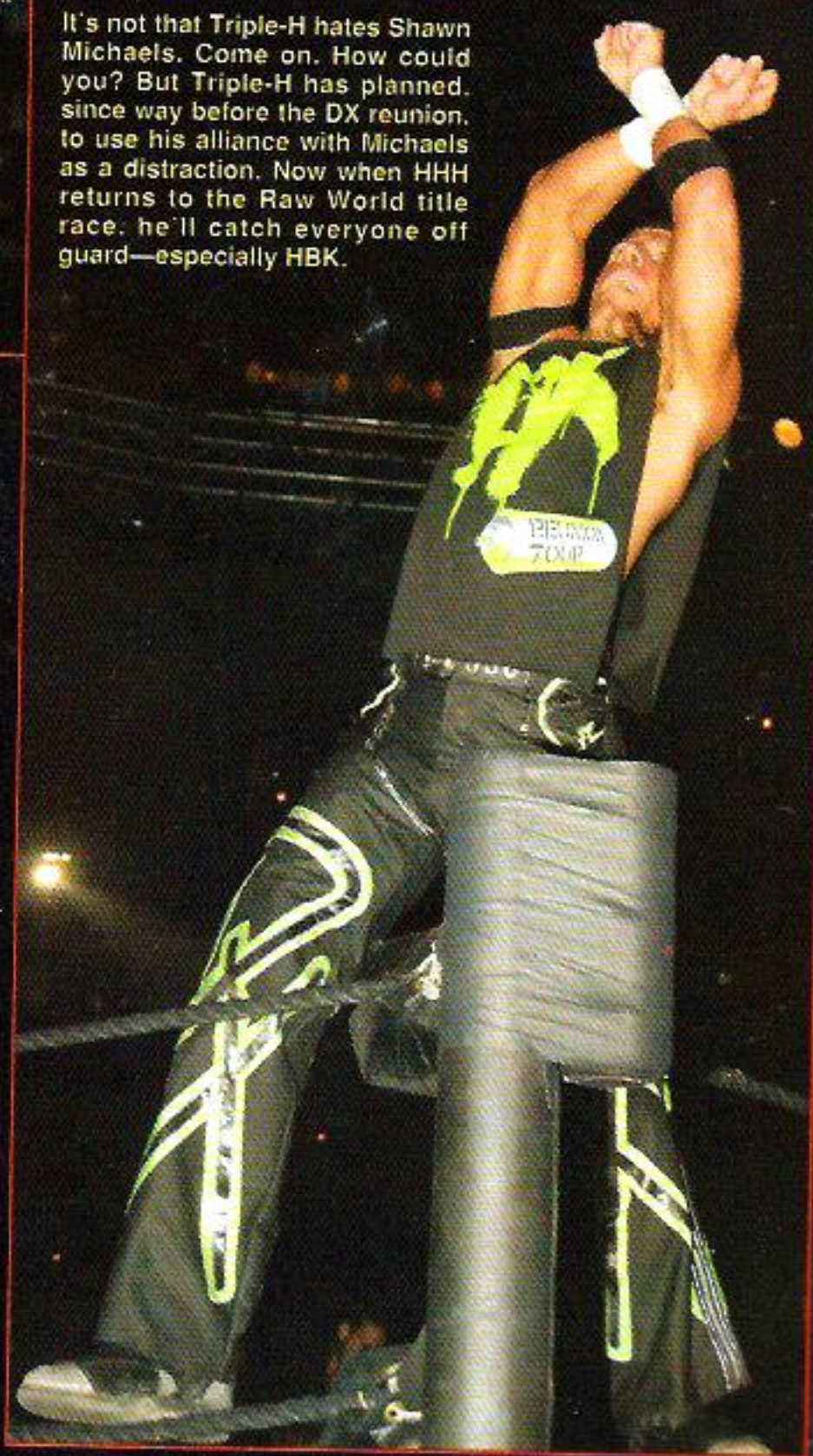
Okay, you're right, you won't find two sports more different than wrestling and golf. But maybe calling Triple-H untrustworthy is oversimplifying the matter just a little. Maybe there's a very fine line between being untrustworthy and being driven to be the very best of the best (the "King of Kings," if you will) in wrestling. The best-drawing matches are those that pit good against evil, and sometimes you have to be willing to be evil to get those big matches, friends be damned.

Maybe we shouldn't have bothered to give that memo to HBK earlier. Michaels has done his share of downright dirty deeds during a career that has lasted more than two decades now. He remembers how Triple-H turned against him as he embarked on an unlikely comeback in 2002, after a four-year hiatus. He remembers the many chapters of their feud since then, including a particularly memorable and brutal last-man-standing match at the 2004 Royal Rumble.

Don't forget that Michaels betrayed Hulk Hogan last summer and in doing so earned himself a very high-profile SummerSlam 2005 bout with "The Hulkster." It was clear that HBK didn't want to turn heel, but he must have felt it was the best way to get a big match with Hogan. A friendly match between two pals wouldn't have sold so well.

So maybe he has never truly trusted his running partner in the months since the DX reunion. Maybe he's already preparing for the next chapter of the

It's not that Triple-H hates Shawn Michaels. Come on. How could you? But Triple-H has planned, since way before the DX reunion, to use his alliance with Michaels as a distraction. Now when HHH returns to the Raw World title race, he'll catch everyone off guard—especially HBK.



THE FLAIR FACTOR

Is This Why "The Game" Takes So Many Turns?

Triple-H grew up watching Ric Flair, idolizing Ric Flair, and dreaming that he could be Ric Flair. In recent years, he's been doing his best to make his childhood dream come true. His style isn't so different from Flair's; he likes to portray himself as the guy women want and men want to be. The arrogance. The expensive tastes. A vast collection of world titles. All to model himself after the "Nature Boy."

He even went so far as to form a Four Horsemen-like clique with Flair. You remember Evolution. Although Flair, now 57, has become more of a sympathetic figure, he still thinks of himself as "the dirtiest player in the game."

To earn that reputation, Flair not only had to cheat at every opportunity in his prime, but also to betray a few dozen or so people who foolishly convinced themselves that "Slick Ric" was a friend for life. Lex Luger, Sting, Dusty Rhodes, Sting, Arn Anderson, Sting, Roddy Piper, Sting, Rick Steamboat, Sting, and did we mention Sting? They've all been hoodwinked by the ultimate hoodwinker. It's almost like a badge of honor to have been betrayed by Flair over the years. He even turned against an NFL player (Kevin Greene).

Like mentor, like student... Triple-H follows the Flair model in that he, too, relishes the role of the villain, and, when he grows weary

of that, he dons a white hat for a while, builds up trust, then rubs it in the face of all those who thought he really had changed for the better.

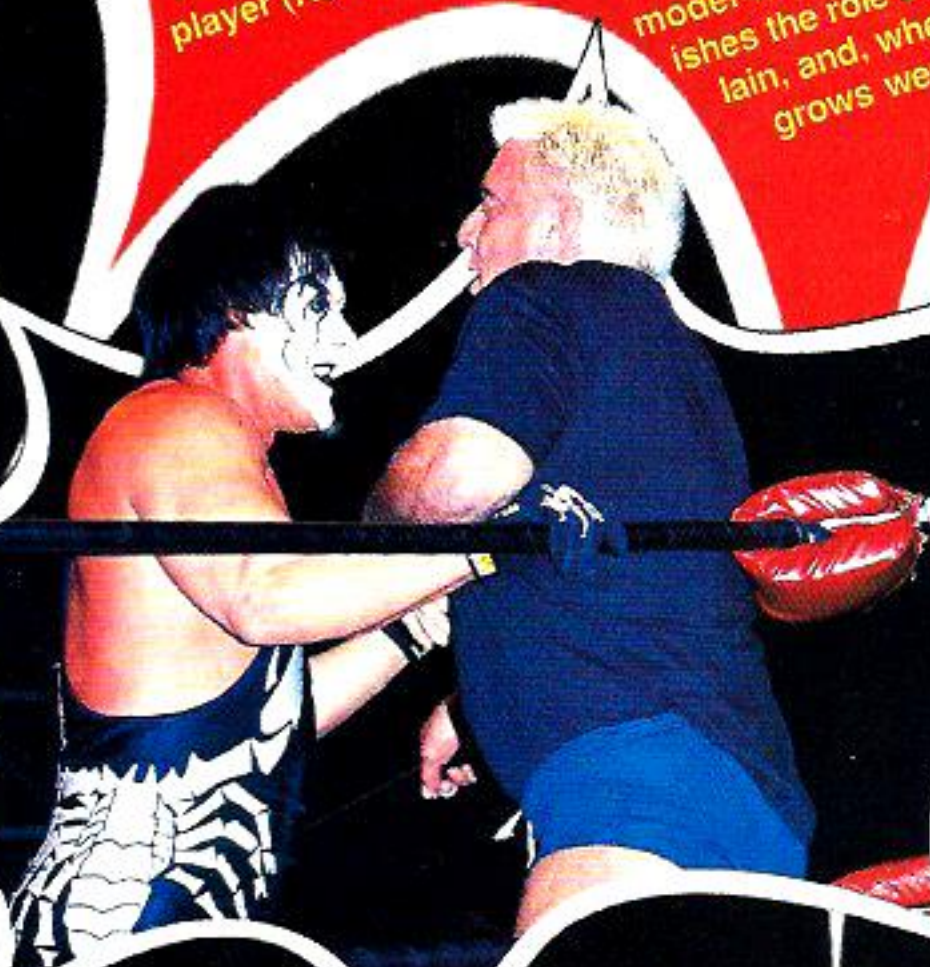
We've detailed the history between Helmsley and Michaels, but who could forget Helmsley's brilliantly orchestrated turn against Randy Orton? More to the point, how about Triple-H's turn last fall against Flair himself when he felt Flair was too happy about winning a secondary (Intercontinental) title? It led to a brief, bloody, and surprisingly even feud.

Both Flair and Triple-H try to argue that most or all of the turns they've orchestrated have been so very personal. They just didn't like those people and just like being hated most of the time.

We say go back and check your wrestling history. Both men are as calculating as a human being can be. Each turn represented career advancement, or at least Flair or Triple-H thought it would. "Did Flair hate Sting every time he betrayed him? Maybe, but he probably felt he couldn't share the hero's spotlight with 'The Stinger.'" Was Triple-H jealous of Orton? Maybe, but he earned an immediate shot at Orton's World title by turning against him.

So is Hunter just emulating his idol? Damn right he is, by being extremely smart, savvy, and calculating. To Flair, it may be the ultimate tribute.

—Dave Lenker



Flair's stung Sting more than once



Helmsley has earned many new allies in his revitalized role as part of DX (above), but these new "friends" should watch their backs and consider the relationship Triple-H currently has with his former accomplices. Randy Orton, who once teamed with Triple-H in Evolution, surely regrets ever trusting the "Cerebral Assassin" (left).



feud, maybe even figuring that the man who survives that feud will be in line for a shot at the Raw World championship. We tried to get a straight answer out of him. Does he trust "The Game"?

"What is there not to trust about the man? He's always been a fine, upstanding member of the community, a model citizen," he told us with a wink.

It is less than two months before we all settle in for the extravaganza that is WrestleMania, this time the 23rd version, to be held at the cavernous Ford Field in Detroit. A heel turn by late-February or early-March would just about guarantee a high-profile grudge match at the big event.

Quite logical, correct?

Which means it probably won't happen ("Cerebral Assassin," remember?). If Triple-H chooses to betray Michaels before WrestleMania 23, their great match may be lost amid other great matches higher on the card. After all, HBK vs. Triple-H is a match we've all seen many times before.

However, were Hunter to turn against HBK at WrestleMania in Detroit, he'd make a lot more headlines, set up a feud with Michaels for after 'Mania, and, if all went according to plan, set himself up for a run at the Raw World title by SummerSlam at the latest.

It's going to happen. It has to happen. It's been inevitable since last summer. Just don't be too judgmental of Triple-H when it does. □

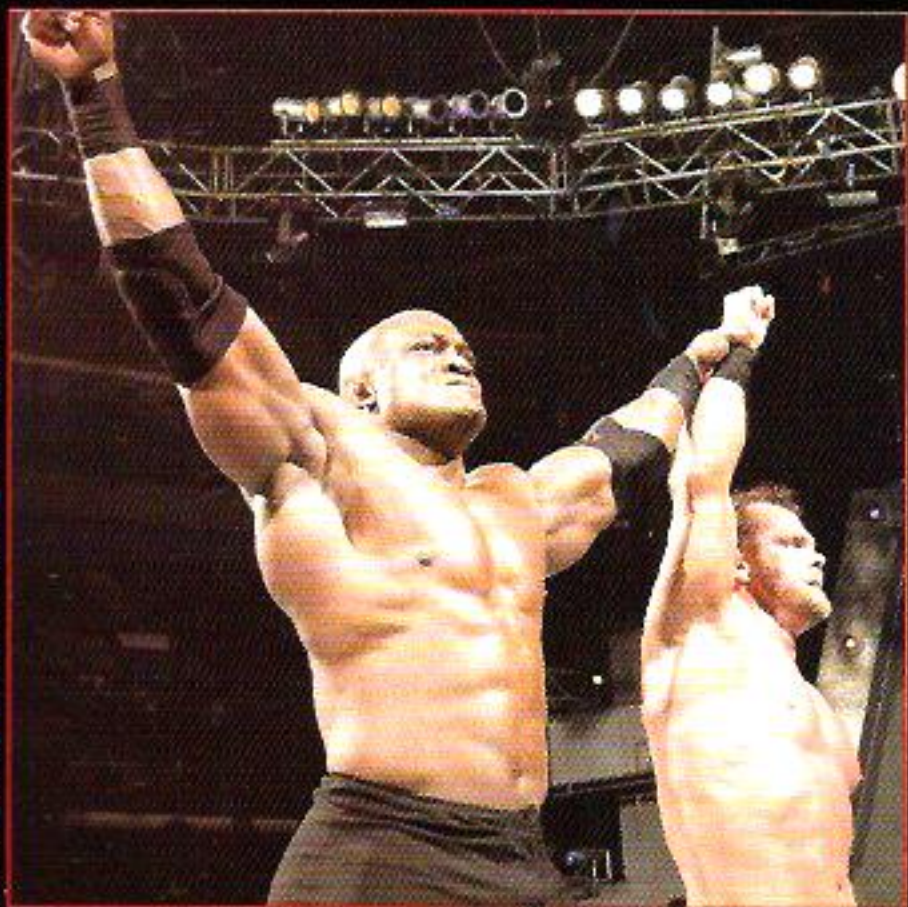
IT SEEMED LIKE the crowning achievement of a very young career. Newest ECW star Bobby Lashley—in his first title match since joining the brand—speared ECW champion The Big Show and made the pin. The fans in attendance at the James Brown Arena in Augusta, Georgia, came alive, realizing they had witnessed history. And Lashley, with a smile on his face and a new title belt, looked as if he had just conquered the world.

He finally won a big one: the ECW heavyweight title. And Lashley hadn't just defeated The Big Show, he had also outlasted four other stars—including Hardcore Holly, C.M. Punk, Test, and Rob Van Dam—in the "Extreme Elimination Chamber" at December to Dismember. To nearly everyone in attendance, it seemed that Lashley had made the right decision leaving Smackdown, where he had been running in place for about a year, never really making a good name for himself, and always coming up short in the few World title opportunities that had been given to him.

"I've talked with him about this before. It's a disagreement we've shared for a long time," said Chris Benoit, who mentored Lashley during his time on Smack-

down. "In Lashley, I see youth and determination and a whole lot of strength. But I also see over-anxiousness. Bobby Lashley just loves to jump into the deep end for everything he gets involved in. It's just his personality. He thinks his time is now and thinks he is invulnerable to all of the shortfalls that have derailed all of those young guns before him. Even though Bobby won the ECW championship right out of the gate, I think it may be too much, too soon for him."

Many insiders agree with Benoit. They say Lashley is far from fully developed as a wrestler. His inexperience didn't prevent him from beating some mid-card talent or even lucking his way



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Chris Benoit has tried to share his years of ring wisdom with the impressionable Bobby Lashley, but, apparently, Lashley needs to learn that patience is a necessary attribute for a wrestler in search of superstardom.

BACKLASH?

come His Biggest Regret

TOO MUCH TOO SOON!

When Winning A World Title Is Career Suicide

Capturing a world title is never a bad thing ... or is it? Throughout wrestling history, there have been various young men who thought a big title win would make their careers soar. They grab our imaginations along the way ... and then they fizzle and fall.

Unfortunately, for every Rock or Kurt Angle to come along and use a world championship run as a steppingstone to greatness, there is a Randy Orton or Tommy Rich who peak way too early in their careers. Here are some of wrestling's biggest championship disappointments:

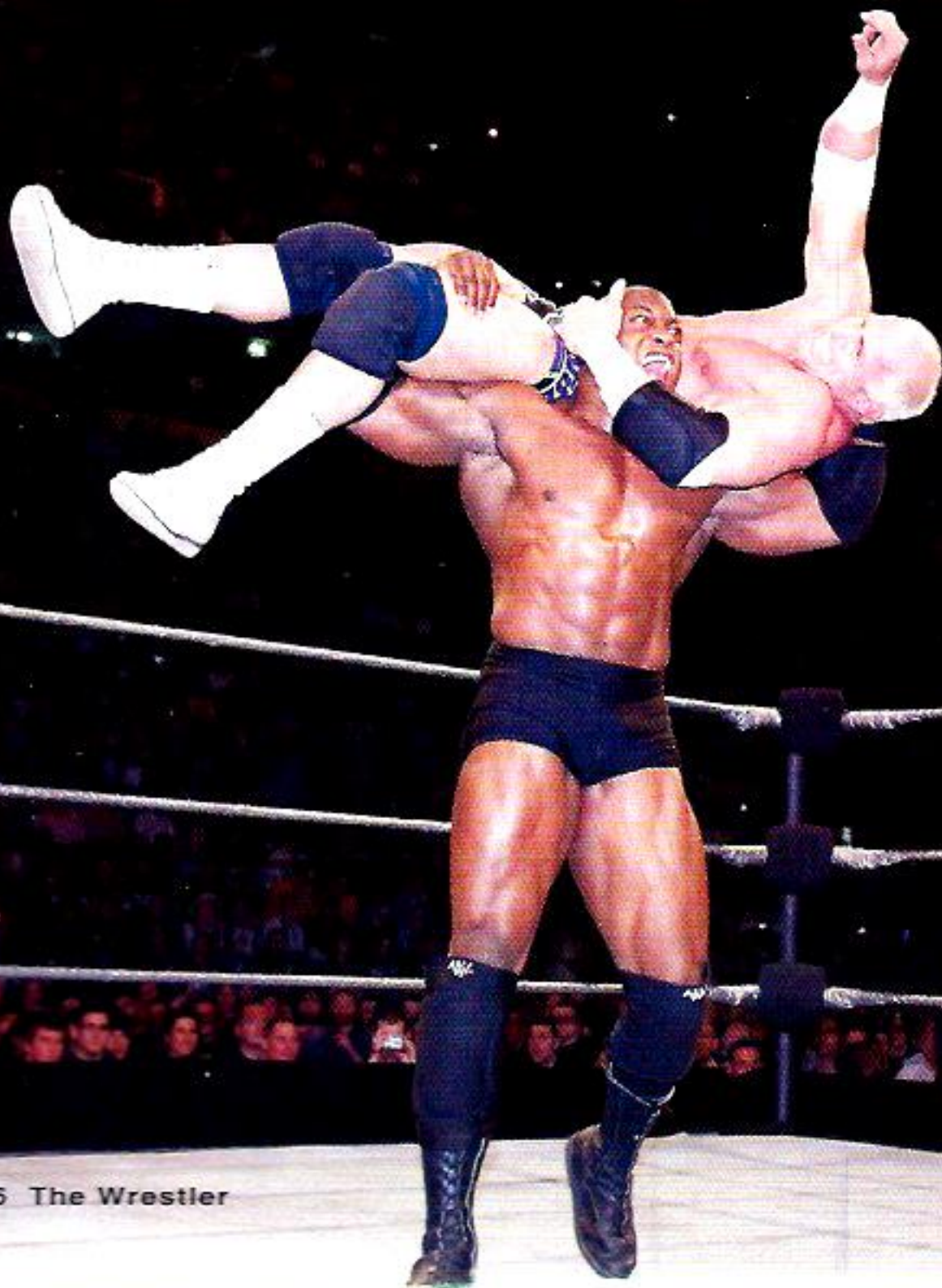
TOMMY RICH: Perhaps no other wrestler epitomizes a fall from grace better than "Wildfire." At age 24, the promising Rich won the NWA World title by beating Harley Race in 1981. Fans rallied behind Rich, as his career seemed destined for even greater heights. Unfortunately for Rich, the run lasted four uninterrupted days before Race was again champion. And this hiccup in Harley Race's career

provided little more than an example of how anything can happen in wrestling.

MIKE AWESOME: The two-time ECW World champion peaked at a time when many of the promotion's top stars had left the company in favor of big-money paychecks in WCW and the WWF. By virtue of his victory over ECW standard-bearer Tazz and top contender Masato Tanaka, Awesome became the dominant, top figure on ECW during its yearlong run on The National Network. Awesome's career unraveled quickly, however, when he made a surprise jump to WCW to assume a number of ridiculous gimmicks.

RANDY ORTON: Since SummerSlam 2004, it seems that Orton's career has been in a tailspin. At that pay-per-view, Orton—who was 24 years old at the time—had become the youngest world champion in WWE history. It was a tremendous show of faith by a company that had big plans for the talent-

Some familiar names have become even more familiar because of their association with the new ECW (C.M. Punk, Test, and Hardcore Holly), and Lashley has been able to hold his own against the best (pictured against Hardcore Holly).



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ed and controversial star. Within a month, Orton lost the Raw World title to Triple-H at Unforgiven. Shortly after, former Evolution-mate Batista replaced him as the brand's top star.

RON SIMMONS: Although a former WCW World champion, Ron Simmons is primarily known as being a former WWE mid-card wrestler who happens to say "damn" a lot. In August 1992, this former Florida State Seminole and Cleveland Brown shocked the wrestling world by beating Big Van Vader for the WCW World title. Simmons enjoyed a brief, popular run as the first African-American to wear world championship gold, but wasn't able to hang on to his main-event status after that.

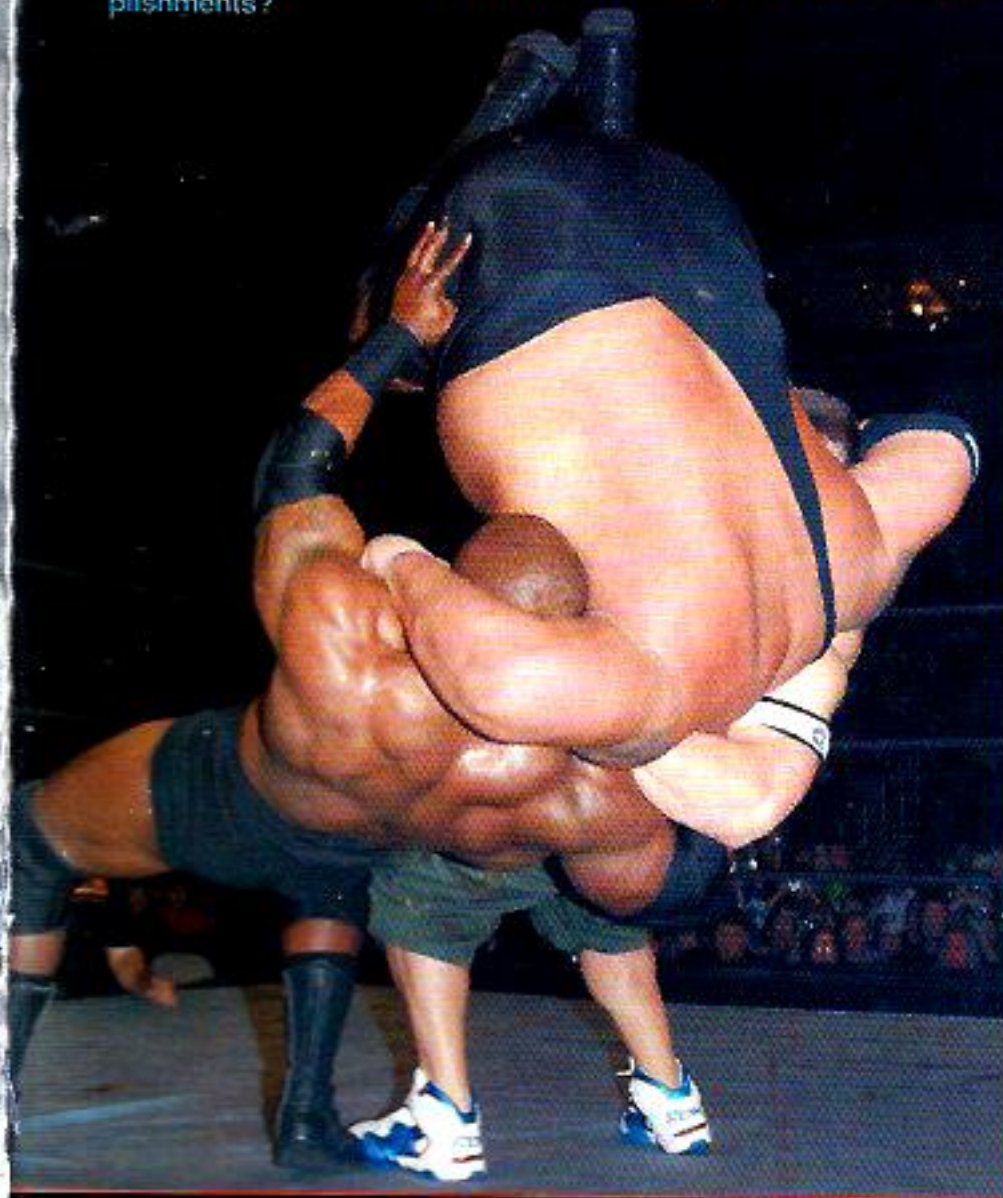
BROCK LESNAR: Considering that Lesnar won three world titles in WWE, it's hard to suggest that he didn't have staying power as a main-eventer. But one can make a strong case that Lesnar could have been a major star for many years to come if he was mentally ready to handle the pressures of being champion. Because of his premature departure, Lesnar will be best remembered for his botched shooting star press at WrestleMania XIX, a failed attempt at making the NFL, and a penchant for using wrestling only for quick money.

—Brady Hicks

Rich in spirit, lacking long-term success



Dominating The Big Show—first with Team Cena at Survivor Series (pictured) and again inside the "Extreme Elimination Chamber" at December to Dismember—boosted Lashley's career considerably. But will Lashley sabotage his own accomplishments?



into a title belt or two by catching opponents by surprise. There is also fear he will start to believe his own hype. "I've seen it many times, where a young wrestler develops some sort of a 'false reality' as to how good he really is," said Matt Hardy, another of Lashley's backstage friends on Smackdown. "I worry for him that by achieving the successes that he has this early in his career, that it could actually harm him in the long run."

In other sports, they call it "peaking too early." In wrestling, it has spelled many a long, frustrating period for those who achieved too much, too soon in their careers. For every Tom Brady to step off the bench late in the season and unexpectedly help his team win the Super Bowl, there is a story of an athlete who sets a goal for himself, achieves it early in his career, and founders from that point forward. And many of Lashley's peers feel his early success in ECW could also potentially signal the end of his effectiveness.

By beating an injured Big Show so easily, Lashley may assume that titles, fame, and marketability are all within his reach. He may assume that these successes are just the beginning for what is to be a long and prolific career.

Lashley's inexperience continued to be a factor until he switched from Smackdown to ECW. During the King of the Ring tournament, that inexperience caused him to lose his temper against Booker T, who went on to win the crown and cape. It caused him to



lose the U.S. title to a physically inferior but more experienced Finlay. And—most recently—it cost him at No Mercy when he seemed more consumed with showing up Batista than actually winning the Smackdown World championship.

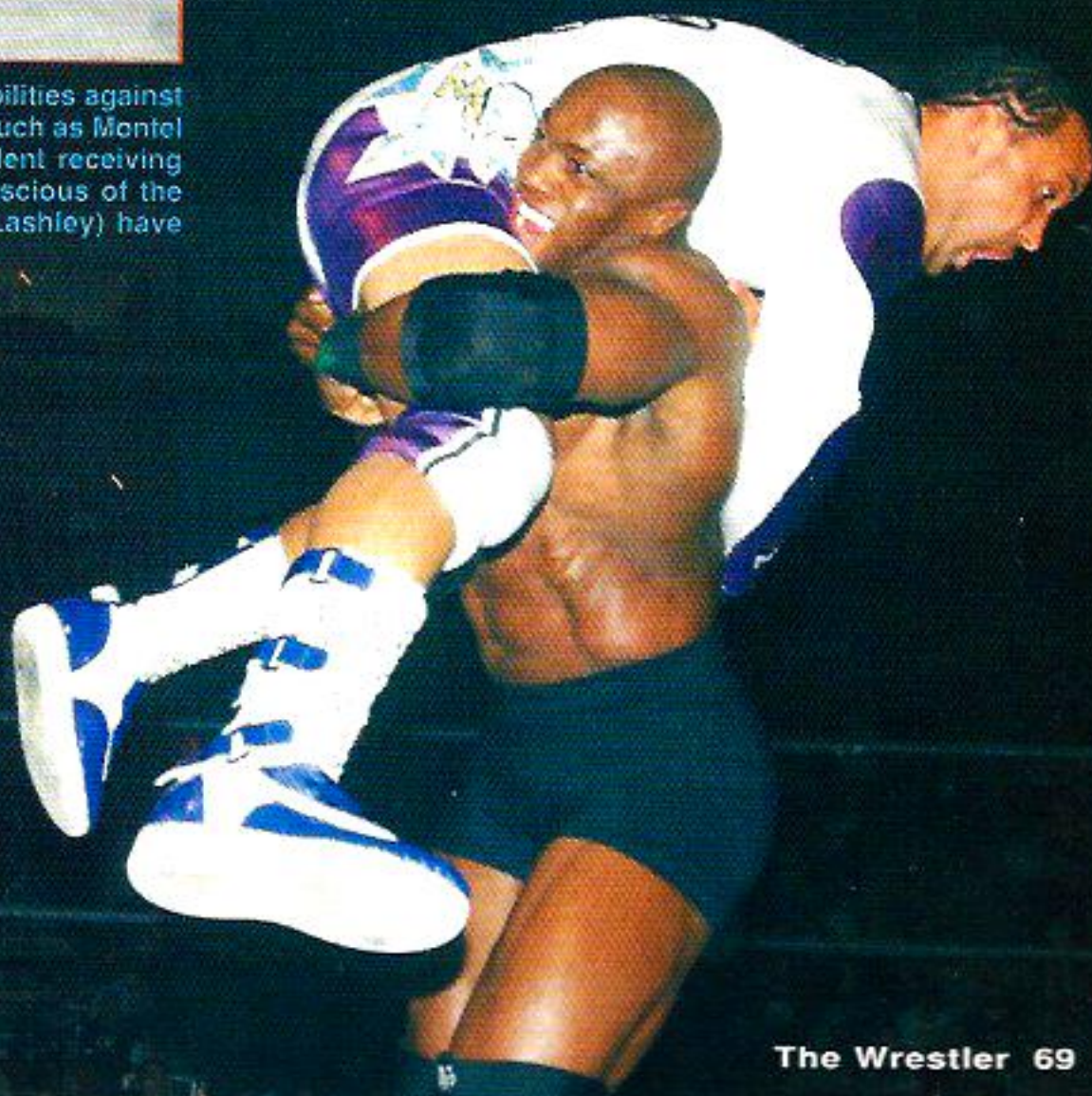
Fortunately, there is no solid evidence that Lashley will become the latest victim of his own success. He enjoyed a considerable amount of success before becoming a pro wrestler. When Lashley attended Missouri Valley College, he was able to win national wrestling championships in 1996, 1997, and 1998 after placing fourth in the U.S. during his first try in 1995. Throughout 1997 and 1998, Lashley was the NAIA National Wrestling champion and later became a champion in the U.S. Army.

Even after entering pro wrestling, Lashley pinned former Smackdown World champion John Bradshaw Layfield to win the U.S. title only eight months into his run on Smackdown. Lashley has shown an ability to cope with success in the past, but he has never experienced such high-profile success as his ECW title victory. Will it be too much for the young man?

"One thing's for sure: You have to admire the kid's guts," said Tommy Dreamer. "He set a goal for himself, and he went out and achieved it. And he was able to do so very quickly, too. That doesn't mean that he's finished developing as a wrestler. It just means that he was fortunate enough to bring home a title belt in spite of all that he still has to learn."

Unfortunately for the ECW champion, enjoying success before gaining experience can be a dangerous thing. But, if anyone is up to the task, it just may be Lashley. □

Not only has Lashley been able to prove his abilities against veterans of the game, but also WWE newcomers, such as Montel Vontavious Porter (right). MVP, another young talent receiving massive amounts of airtime, may want to be conscious of the hasty decisions that his predecessors (namely Lashley) have come to regret.



Wrestler[®]

TOP 10

- 1 JOHN CENA**
260, West Newbury, MA
(1) Raw World champion
- 2 BATISTA**
318, Washington, DC
(10) Smackdown World champion
- 3 ABYSS**
295, parts unknown
(-) NWA World champion
- 4 BOBBY LASHLEY**
255, Topeka, KS
(-) ECW champion
- 5 HIROSHI TANAHASHI**
227, Ogaki, Japan
(-) IWGP heavyweight champion
- 6 HOMICIDE**
220, Brooklyn, NY
(-) Ring of Honor champion
- 7 CHRIS BENOIT**
224, Edmonton, Alberta
(-) WWE U.S. champion
- 8 MITSU HARU MISAWA**
238, Ashikaga, Japan
(-) GHC heavyweight champion
- 9 STING**
255, Venice Beach, CA
(2) No. 1 contender: NWA World title
- 10 UMAGA**
348, Isle of Samoa
(-) No. 1 contender: Raw World title



Umaga

TAG TEAMS

- 1 RANDY ORTON & EDGE**
Combined weight: 485 pounds
(-) Raw World tag team champions
- 2 PAUL LONDON & BRIAN KENDRICK**
Combined weight: 380 pounds
(1) Smackdown World tag team champions
- 3 HOMICIDE & HERNANDEZ**
Combined weight: 495 pounds
(2) NWA World tag team champions
- 4 SHAD GASPARD & JTG**
Combined weight: 500 pounds
(7) No. 1 contenders: Raw World tag team title
- 5 MATT & JEFF HARDY**
Combined weight: 425 pounds
(-) No. 2 contenders: Raw World tag team title
- 6 WILLIAM REGAL & DAVE TAYLOR**
Combined weight: 515 pounds
(-) No. 1 contenders: SD World tag team title
- 7 JOEY MERCURY & JOHNNY NITRO**
Combined weight: 417 pounds
(-) No. 2 contenders: SD World tag team title
- 8 CHRISTOPHER DANIELS & MATT SYDAL**
Combined weight: 387 pounds
(-) Ring of Honor tag team champions
- 9 DEUCE & DOMINO**
Combined weight: 497 pounds
(-) OVW Southern tag team champions
- 10 TEAM 3D**
Combined weight: 521 pounds
(10) No. 1 contenders: NWA World tag team title

WWE RAW

Raw World Champion:

JOHN CENA

(C) 260, West Newbury, MA

- 1-UMAGA**
(7) 348, Isle of Samoa
- 2-JEFF HARDY**
(1) 212, Cameron, NC
- 3-EDGE**
(5) 240, Toronto, Ontario
- 4-JOHN NITRO**
(6) 204, Hanover, WV
- 5-TRIPLE-H**
(2) 274, Greenwich, CT
- 6-RANDY ORTON**
(3) 245, St. Louis, MO
- 7-SHAWN MICHAELS**
(4) 217, San Antonio, TX
- 8-CARLITO**
(9) 220, San Juan, Puerto Rico
- 9-SHELTON BENJAMIN**
(10) 245, Minneapolis, MN
- 10-RIC FLAIR**
(8) 243, Charlotte, NC

WWE SMACKDOWN

Smackdown World Champion:

BATISTA

(1) 318, Washington, DC

- 1-CHRIS BENOIT**
(2) 224, Edmonton, Alberta
- 2-THE UNDERTAKER**
(5) 304, Dallas, TX
- 3-KEN KENNEDY**
(4) 246, Minneapolis, MN
- 4-KING BOOKER**
(C) 250, Houston, TX
- 5-CHAVO GUERRERO JR.**
(6) 210, El Paso, TX
- 6-FINLAY**
(9) 235, Belfast, Ireland
- 7-MVP**
(-) 252, Miami, FL
- 8-KANE**
(-) 326, St. Louis, MO
- 9-GREGORY HELMS**
(10) 210, Raleigh, NC
- 10-MATT HARDY**
(-) 213, Cameron, NC

ECW

ECW Champion:

BOBBY LASHLEY

(-) 255, Topeka, KS

- 1-TEST**
(2) 285, Toronto, Ontario
- 2-ROB VAN DAM**
(1) 237, Battle Creek, MI
- 3-C.M. PUNK**
(3) 210, Chicago, IL
- 4-SABU**
(4) 220, Bombay, India
- 5-MIKE KNOX**
(5) 250, Amarillo, TX
- 6-MAHONEY**
(6) 361, Nutley, NJ
- 7-MATT STRIKER**
(9) 215, Bayside, NY
- 8-HARDCORE HOLLY**
(-) 249, Mobile, AL
- 9-TOMMY DREAMER**
(-) 265, Yonkers, NY
- 10-THE SANDMAN**
(8) 244, Sandy, UT

TNA

NWA World Champion:

ABYSS

(7) 295, parts unknown

- 1-STING**
(C) 255, Venice Beach, CA
- 2-SAMOA JOE**
(1) 270, Isle of Samoa
- 3-CHRISTOPHER DANIELS**
(9) 210, Los Angeles, CA
- 4-KURT ANGLE**
(-) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
- 5-CHRISTIAN CAGE**
(3) 225, Toronto, Ontario
- 6-A.J. STYLES**
(2) 202, Gainesville, GA
- 7-TRAVIS TOMKO**
(-) 292, Tombstone, AZ
- 8-PETEY WILLIAMS**
(-) 179, Windsor, Ontario
- 9-RHINO**
(5) 275, Detroit, MI
- 10-CHRIS SABIN**
(6) 207, Detroit, MI

OFFICIAL RATINGS

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

For period ended December 23, 2006

AWA SUPREME CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Robert Royale; 1—Damien Divine; 2—Mic Noble; 3—Billy Maverick; 4—Eric Draven; 5—Biff Wellington III; 6—Johnny Spade; 7—Kliff Hanger; 8—Ricky Ruckus; 9—Johnny Strattlin; 10—Dez.

BLACK DIAMOND WRESTLING: Champion—Nikita Allanon; 1—Jason Gory; 2—Dan Sandwich; 3—Justin Idol; 4—Zac Vincent; 5—DDK; 6—Dash Bennett; 7—Brandon X; 8—Jake Garrett; 9—Devin Devine; 10—Chris Maverick.

CAROLINA WRESTLING ENTERTAINMENT: Champion—Scotty Matthews; 1—Bounty Hunter; 2—Aaron Devil; 3—D.J. P. Roc; 4—Rick Link; 5—Ace Crusader; 6—Lucky Leroy Greene; 7—Tre G; 8—Billy Blade; 9—D.Z. Hyde; 10—Sean Altly.

NATIONAL INDEPENDENT CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Scotty Blaze; 1—Ken Steel; 2—Wyld Chyld; 3—Mike Slaughter; 4—Dustin Daniels; 5—Knightstalker; 6—Damien James; 7—El Scorpiono; 8—Buddy Love; 9—Kris James; 10—Joe Poore.

NORTHEAST WRESTLING: Champion—Xavier; 1—A.J. Styles; 2—Samoa Joe; 3—Jay Lethal; 4—Christian Cage; 5—Jerry Lawler; 6—Chris Sabin; 7—Abyss; 8—Josh Daniels; 9—Antonio Thomas; 10—Romeo Roselli.

PRO-WRESTLING WORLD-1: Champion—Ricky Landell; 1—King Kaluha; 2—Glacier; 3—Sterling James Keenan; 4—Josh Daniels; 5—Dustin

Rhodes; 6—The Patriot; 7—Steve Corino; 8—Greg Spitz; 9—Nicky Benz; 10—Tomoaki Honma.

PRO-WRESTLING WORLD-1 JOSH: Champion—Amazing Kong; 1—Allison Danger; 2—HIKARU; 3—Cindy Rogers; 4—Seki Maemura; 5—Cheerleader Melissa; 6—Sara Del Ray; 7—Alere Little Feather; 8—Amber O'Neal; 9—21st Century Fox; 10—Melissa Stripes.

PRO-WRESTLING ZERO1-MAX: Champion—Ryouji Sai; 1—Takao Omori; 2—Minoru Fujita; 3—Kohei Sato; 4—Shinjiro Otani; 5—Kazunari Murakami; 6—Ikuto Hidaka; 7—Bambi Killer; 8—Kamikaze; 9—Yoshihito Sasaki; 10—Steve Corino.

RING WARS CAROLINA: Champion—Hangtime; 1—Eddie Brown; 2—Aaron Devil; 3—Tre G; 4—Gary Tater; 5—Styx; 6—Tito Rain; 7—Josh Hunter; 8—Cletus Bass; 9—Sgt. Chaos; 10—Wallabee Joe.

TEXAS ALL-STAR WRESTLING: Champion—ZenZen; 1—Bobby 2Badd; 2—Bubba Lee Travis; 3—Wildcat Scoby Gober; 4—Nasty Nick Daniels; 5—Justin Blaze; 6—Dylan Starr; 7—Chip Dumas; 8—Mark The Nevelon; 9—Riley Burke; 10—Jed-Lo.

WORLD CLASS EXTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Daniel Messina; 1—Xavier Rush; 2—Hangtime; 3—Corey Edsel; 4—Aaron Devil; 5—Josh Hunter; 6—Big Law Man; 7—Tre G; 8—Billy Blade; 9—Damian Kage; 10—D.Z. Hyde.

RING OF HONOR

ROH Champion:

HOMICIDE

(7) 220, Brooklyn, NY

1—BRYAN DANIELSON
(C) 185, Aberdeen, WA

2—SAMOA JOE
(5) 270, Isle of Samoa

3—DELIRIOUS
(6) 192, parts unknown

4—NIGEL McGUINNESS
(2) 220, London, England

5—RODERICK STRONG
(3) 205, Tampa, FL

6—AUSTIN ARIES
(4) 202, Milwaukee, WI

7—JAY BRISCOE
(-) 205, Laurel, DE

8—DAVEY RICHARDS
(8) 202, Othello, WA

9—CHRISTOPHER DANIELS
(-) 210, Los Angeles, CA

10—JIMMY RAVE
(9) 175, Atlanta, GA

OVW

OVW Champion:

JACOB DUNCAN

(8) 335, Louisville, KY

1—SETH SKYFIRE
(7) 195, Birmingham, AL

2—CHARLES EVANS
(3) 285, Third Ward, TX

3—CHET THE JET
(C) 230, Buffalo, NY

4—PAUL BIRCHALL
(-) 281, Surrey, England

5—DEVON DRISCOLL
(2) 220, Louisville, KY

6—SHAWN SPEARS
(4) 235, Louisville, KY

7—MIKE KRUEL
(5) 210, New York, NY

8—OLEG PRUDIUS
(6) 310, Moscow, Russia

9—ELIJAH BURKE
(9) 230, Jacksonville, FL

10—STEVE LEWINGTON
(-) 225, Wokingham, England

JAPAN

1—HIROSHI TANAHASHI

(2) 227, Ogaki, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion

2—MITSU HARU MISAWA

(-) 228, Ashikaga, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion

3—MINORU SUZUKI

(3) 220, Yokohama, Japan
All Japan Triple Crown champion

4—KOJI KANEMOTO

(5) 205, Osaka, Japan

5—SATOSHI KOJIMA

(-) 243, Tokyo, Japan

6—HIROYOSHI TENZAN

(7) 270, Tokyo, Japan

7—NAOMICHI MARUFUJI

(1) 211, Saitama, Japan

8—TOSHI AKI KAWADA

(-) 245, Ashikaga, Japan

9—KEIJI MUTO

(-) 253, Yamanashi, Japan

10—KENTA

(4) 179, Saitama, Japan

MEXICO

1—MISTICO

(1) 177, Mexico City, Mexico

2—EL HIJO DEL SANTO

(2) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico

3—PERRO AGUAYO JR.

(9) 200, Zacatecas, Mexico

4—DR. WAGNER JR.

(-) 215, Mexico City, Mexico

5—ULTIMO GUERRERO

(5) 173, Mexico City, Mexico

6—LA PARKA

(8) 206, Sonora, Mexico

7—HECTOR GARZA

(-) 209, Monterrey, Mexico

8—ATLANTIS

(6) 180, Guadalajara, Mexico

9—BLACK WARRIOR

(3) 201, Torreon, Mexico

10—L.A. PARK

(-) 230, Coahuila, Mexico

WOW
Remember him?

What has Armando Alejandro Estrada done to this man? Before Umaga stormed into WWE, he wrestled under a few other names, including Ekmo (as half of The Island Boys) and Jamal (as half of Three-Minute Warning). His partner in both of those tag teams went on to become Rosey, a good-natured superhero-in-training. And Umaga's brother is Rikishi, formerly known as Fatu, a wrestler known for "making a difference." Judging by this photo, Umaga could have been a positive role model as well ... instead of a raving maniac.

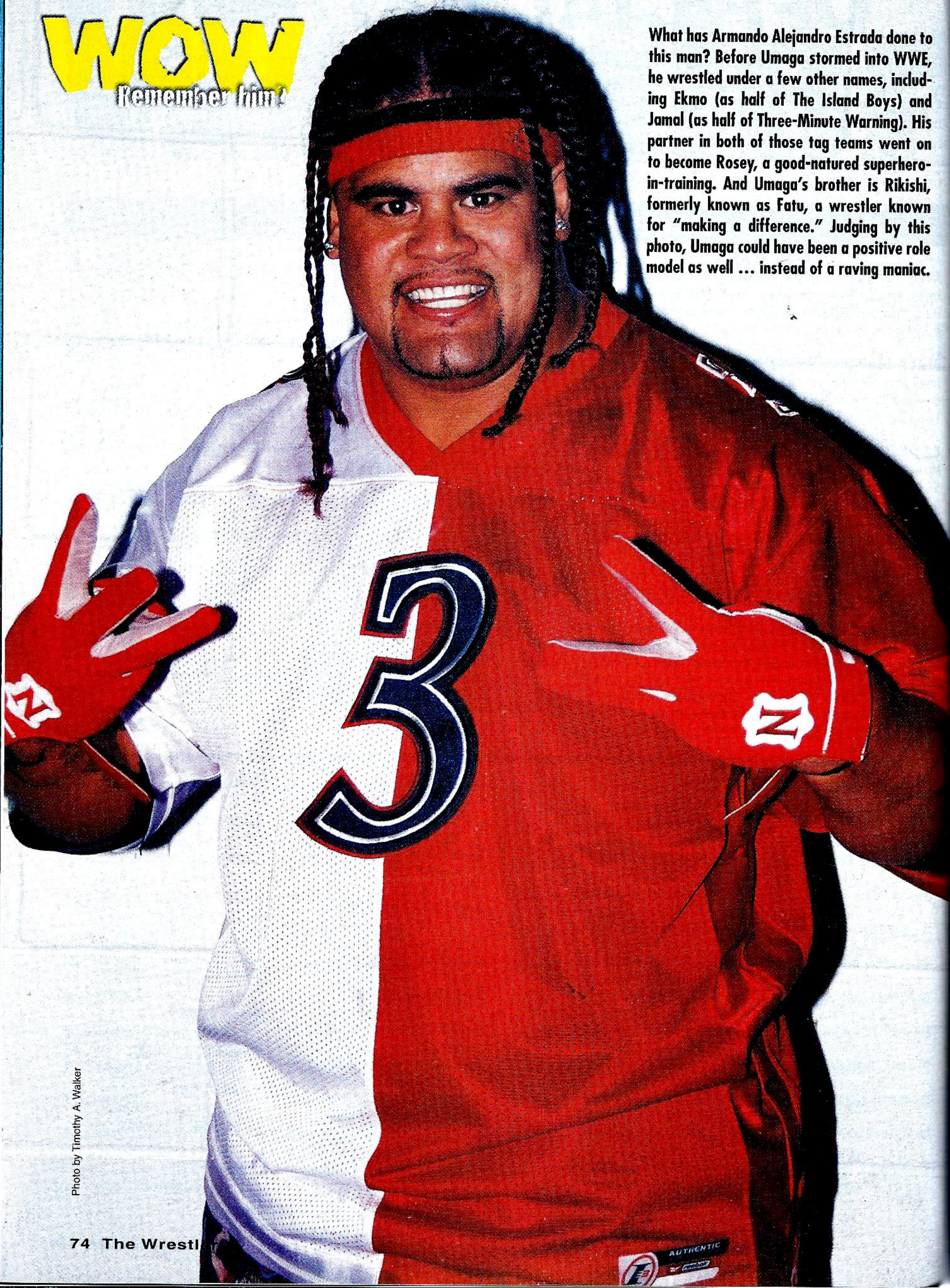


Photo by Timothy A. Walker

Batista

Smackdown World champion

Photo by George Napolitano



Abyss

NWA World champion

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



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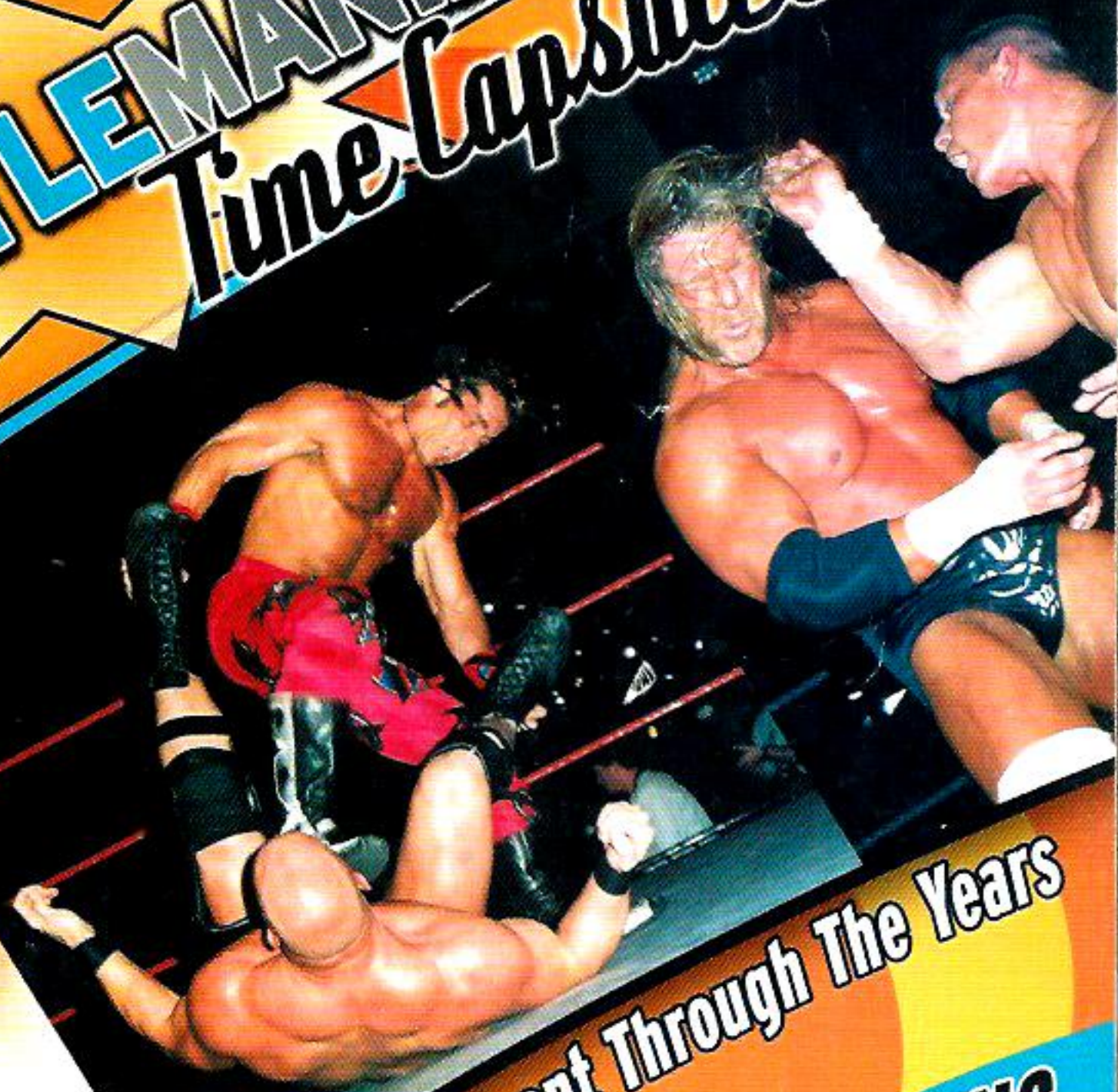
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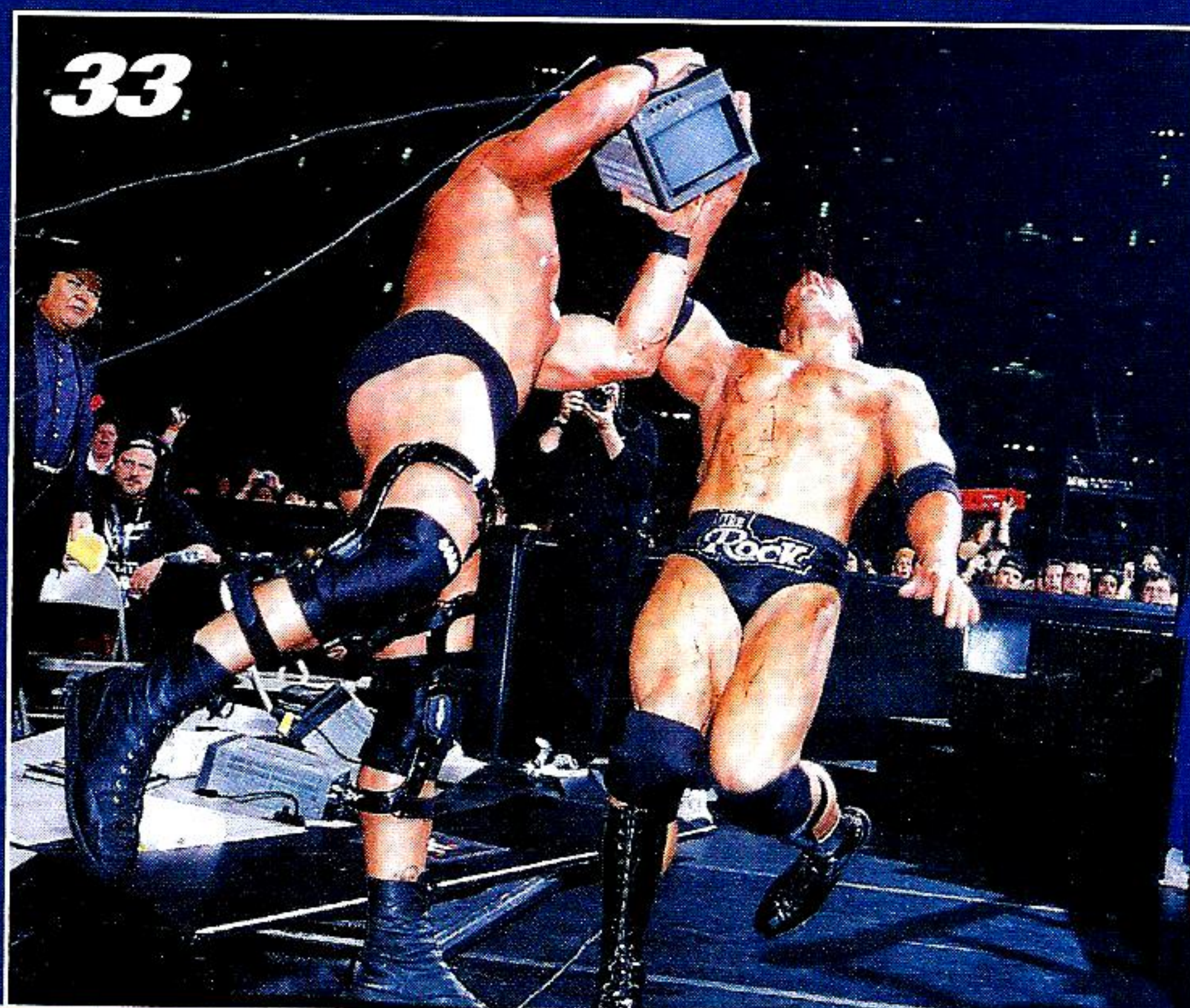
HOTSEAT: STING
"I should be the face
of TNA in 2007"

inside wrestling

THE MAGAZINE THAT RIPS THE LID OFF PRO WRESTLING

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 SINCERELY YOURS
- 6 NAMES MAKIN' NEWS by Harry Burkett
- 12 DATA SHEET: MONTEL VONTAVIOUS PORTER
- 13 DATA SHEET: ERIC YOUNG
- 14 ON THE ROAD with Dave Lenker
- 16 THE INSIDER by Brandi Mankiewicz
- 18 CAPSULE PROFILE #334: CHRISTOPHER DANIELS
- 20 WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ... ? by Scott Teal
- 22 PLAIN SPEAKING with Matt Brock
- 24 WRESTLING'S GREATEST PHOTOS
- 60 EDITORS' ROUNDTABLE
- 64 WRESTLING TIMELINE: CHRIS BENOIT
- 72 WOW! CHECK OUT THIS SHOT!
- 74 INSIDE WRESTLING ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS



FEATURES

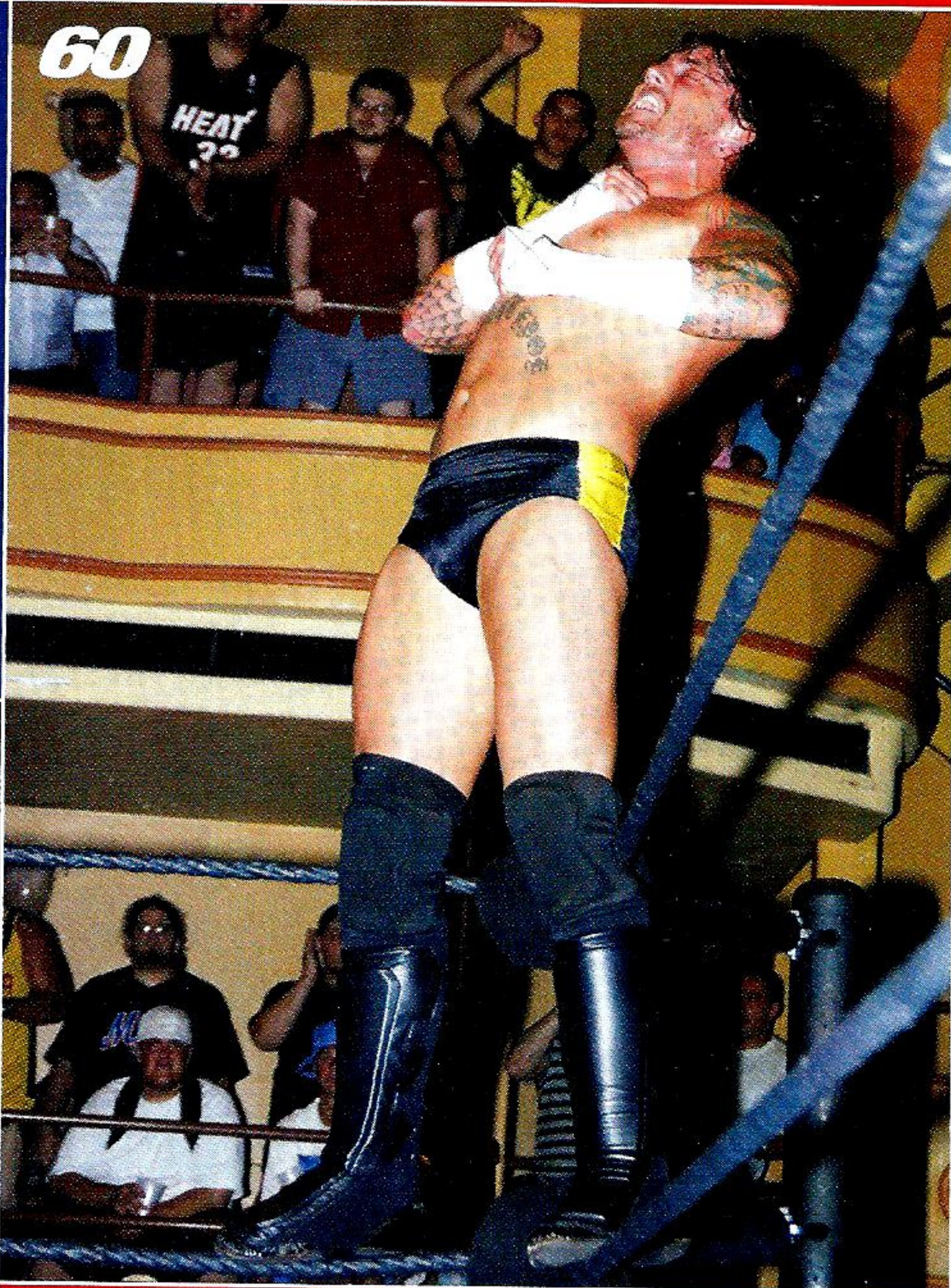
- 33 WRESTLEMANIA TIME CAPSULES**
EXAMINING WWE'S BIGGEST EVENT THROUGH THE YEARS
To celebrate the approach of WrestleMania 23 (my, how time flies!), we delved into our archives and assembled a variety of write-ups that appeared in our family of magazines about the previous 22 WrestleManias

- 56 HOTSEAT: STING**
"I should be the face of TNA in 2007"

COVER PHOTOS:

Hulk Hogan and Andre the Giant: ©1988 National Broadcasting Company, Inc.
Shawn Michaels vs. Steve Austin: Photo by Bill Apter
John Cena vs. Triple-H: Photo by George Napolitano

COVER DESIGN:
Jim Malloy



Look for the Volume 14, 2007 issue
of *The Wrestler*/INSIDE WRESTLING on sale March 13, 2007.

sincerely yours

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TURKEYS INDEED!

I appreciate the "Turnbuckle Turkey" awards. In my opinion, each one was perfectly justified.

For example, Shannon Moore made a joke out of himself in 2006. He should have paid attention to Raven instead of Matt Hardy. He would have been huge in the X division.

Rob Van Dam did not just make a mistake by traveling with Sabu, but also by how he became champion. His victory over Cena was weak. It should have been a clean

win. His winning due to outside interference made ECW wrestlers seem like cowardly chumps who cannot fight their own fights. If RVD had won the Raw World title in the classy way that Chris Benoit won the same title in 2004, he would be more respected today.

Randy Orton's unprofessional behavior ensured that WWE would never trust him with another world title run. Vince McMahon is a "turkey" for so many obvious reasons that I don't have to go any further. Vickie Guerrero should have stayed out of wrestling, both out of respect for her late husband and her own dignity.

Also, Spike TV squandered much

of the year by refusing to give TNA a prime time slot. Hopefully, the addition of Kurt Angle and perhaps other WWE talent will persuade Spike TV to give TNA complete support. That way, Spike TV President Doug Herzog can avoid a "Turnbuckle Turkey" award next year.

NAME WITHHELD
nobodyninja1@aol.com

THE RETURN OF ECW

I think that ECW has finally begun to take shape. At the beginning, the brand had only a few great stars and came across like WWE's ignored middle child. It suffered from stale storylines and bland ring styles—and it seemed like a dumping ground for overpaid jobbers.

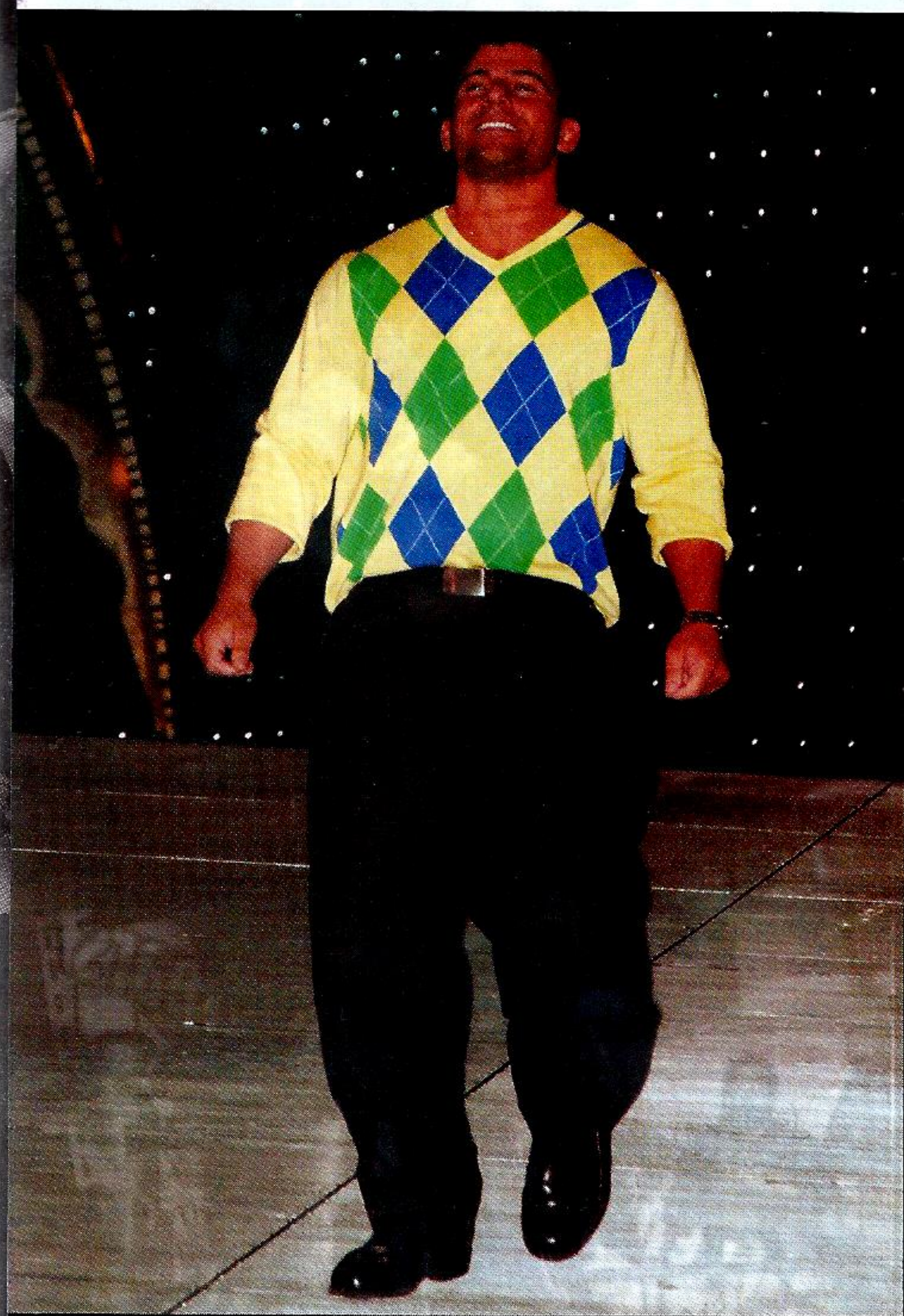
After Rob Van Dam's suspension, Kurt Angle's departure, and the inclusion of Matt Striker, ECW seemed destined to go down the toilet, but somehow—in my opinion—it has risen from the ashes and become a real force. The growing popularity and skills of C.M. Punk and Bobby Lashley, along with the appeal of the ECW Originals, should provide fans with the adrenaline rush they are seeking.

With Vince McMahon involved, ECW may never regain the cult-like status it once enjoyed, but, for a new generation of fans that didn't get to experience the former ECW, it is better than nothing. And it's definitely better than listening to The Miz hyping the Diva Search or too much of The Spirit Squad.

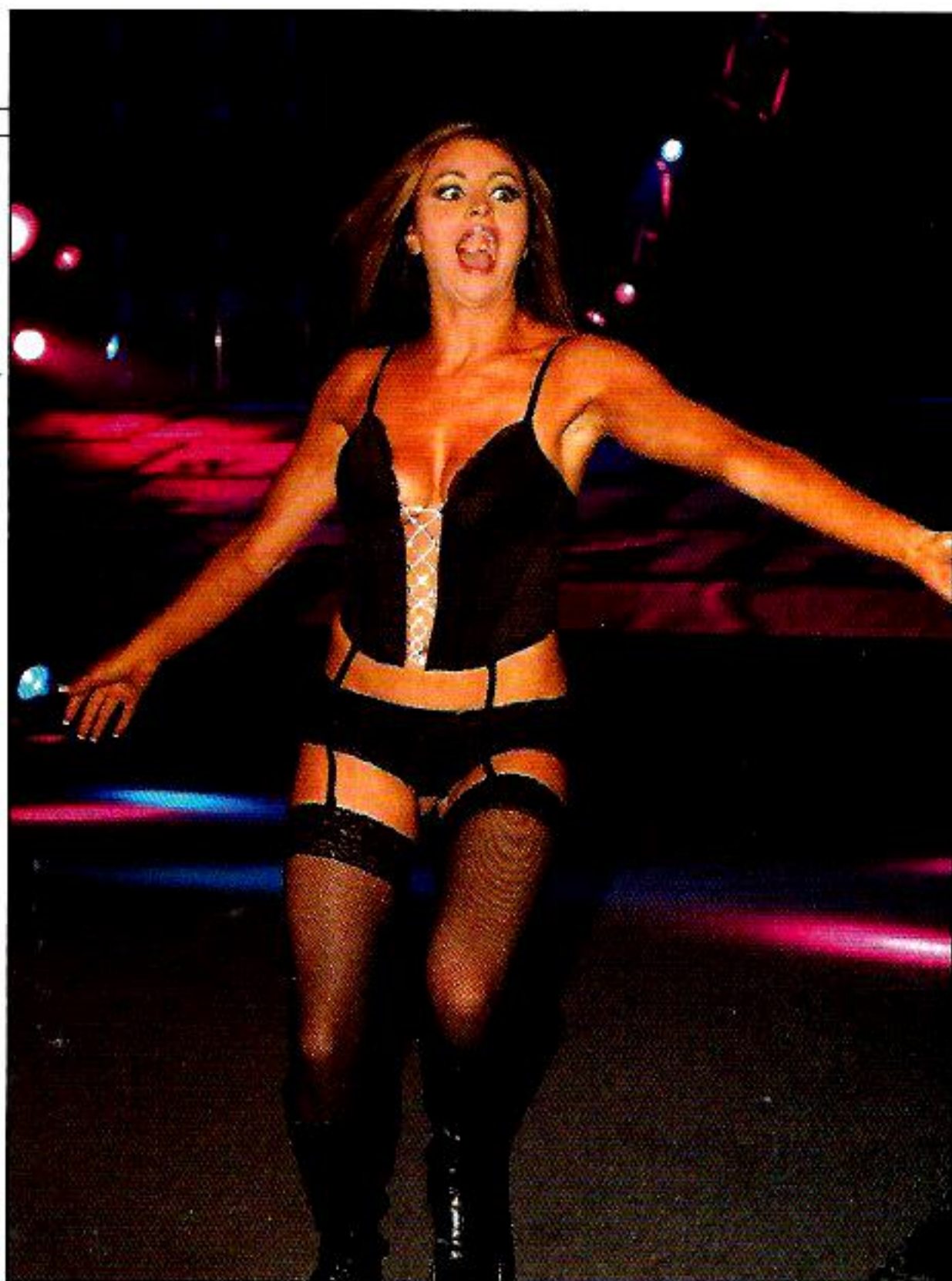
MIKE ANDERSON
Auckland, New Zealand

FROM THIS ANGLE

Kurt Angle made his mark in WWE because he came off as an egomaniacal buffoon who delivered funny lines. That was okay



What is so hardcore about Matt Striker? Not much, but that won't prevent reader Mike Anderson from watching the new ECW. As long as fans are safe from The Miz and The Spirit Squad, he is a satisfied fan.



Maria Kanellis is not exactly who we had in mind to fill Trish Stratus' boots, but reader Kevin Lonergan offers a pretty convincing argument in her favor. Maybe WWE Creative has an opening!

for the time, but I think Angle was struggling to find a place in WWE at the time of his departure. That probably had as much to do with him jumping to TNA as his physical problems. Thankfully, I believe TNA is handling his character just right now.

The same is true of Christian Cage. His comedic timing worked really well for him in WWE. Rather than go back to that, TNA chose to mold him into a cool, good-guy champion in the beginning, instead of a devious heel.

I understand the logic. The members of TNA's creative team

don't want to steal WWE concepts. They think it's better to tweak their characters to fit into their own storylines and the general feel of the promotion.

Also, I'm sure that wrestlers such as Angle and Cage appreciate having more control over their characters. TNA seems to be using WCW's tactic, which is offering WWE/WWF stars more creative latitude if they switch companies. Of course, the key to this working is not repeating WCW's mistake and giving them too much control.

There is a certain WWE

employee who I think would enjoy a little more creative control just about now. That man is Rob Van Dam. For him, TNA may be closer to the original ECW than the new ECW.

VINCENT FRANKLYN
Detroit, MI

DITZ NO MORE

Now that Trish Stratus has left WWE, there seems to be a need to fill those lovely boots of hers. There is one woman with the talent and the charisma to carry the torch that Trish left behind, but, sadly, she has been held down and buried by WWE Creative for too long. The lady I'm talking about is Maria Kanellis!

It really is pathetic that someone with such potential is wasted each week on Raw, being used as a punching bag or a bad skit. But I have a simple yet brilliant plan to help get Maria the respect she truly deserves: It's time for sweet, innocent, ditzy Maria to wise up and go to the dark side!

That's right. A heel turn by Maria would do wonders for her career. Once she drops the ditzy act and becomes evil and smart, people will see her much differently. I'd love to see this evil version of Maria use brass knuckles and her boots on the WWE Divas to cheat to win and slap the taste out of anyone's mouth who tries to disrespect her. If all goes well, she can inspire Nick Dinsmore to drop the Eugene act and finally be taken seriously.

So, if Maria or WWE Creative is reading this, please take a moment and consider what a great women's champion the new and improved evil Maria would be for your roster. I know Trish Stratus would be proud (or shocked!).

KEVIN LONERGAN
Hyannis, MA □

By Harry Burkett

WITH PUBLIC APPROVAL of the Iraq War slipping in the polls and visiting the troops becoming passé for most celebrities, WWE once again displayed its strong commitment to America's fighting men and women during a recent holiday tour. The first stop for most of the WWE Superstars was the Forward Operating Base Warhorse in Baqouba, Iraq.

Intercontinental champion **Jeff Hardy**, Raw World tag team champions **Randy Orton** and **Edge**, **Carlito**, **Chris Masters**, and **Torrie Wilson** were among the notables who visited troops of the Third Brigade Combat Team, First Infantry Division. During the visit, wrestlers met with soldiers, signed autographs, and handed out gifts at a meet-and-greet held at the base's gym.

"We wanted to come out here to build morale," said Hardy. "This means the world to me that we are here. I just hope it means the world to the soldiers also."

Yet that was merely the first stop on WWE's ambitious tour. Other stars who made the trip included Raw World champion **John Cena**, **The Undertaker**, **Hardcore Holly**, **Shelton Benjamin**, **Kristal Marshall**, and **Melina**. In all, the WWE contingent visited 25 military installations throughout Iraq.

WWE Chairman **Vince McMahon**, **John Bradshaw Layfield**, and **Lilian Garcia**—recognized as the most fervent supporters of the annual holiday tour—were among the contingent again this year. Interestingly, ECW champion **Bobby Lashley**, who served in the U.S. Army for three years before joining WWE's developmental program, was making his first tour of Iraq as a WWE Superstar.

"When they come out here, they put themselves at risk

just so we can meet them and get some pictures," said **Pvt. James Johnson** of the 215th Brigade Support Battalion, who was quoted in *Stars & Stripes*.

One of the more interesting aspects of the trip is that the WWE Superstars delivered holiday cards—complete with printed messages left by fans on wwe.com—to the troops. While there, WWE taped a special edition of *Raw* that was scheduled to air on Christmas night on the USA Network.

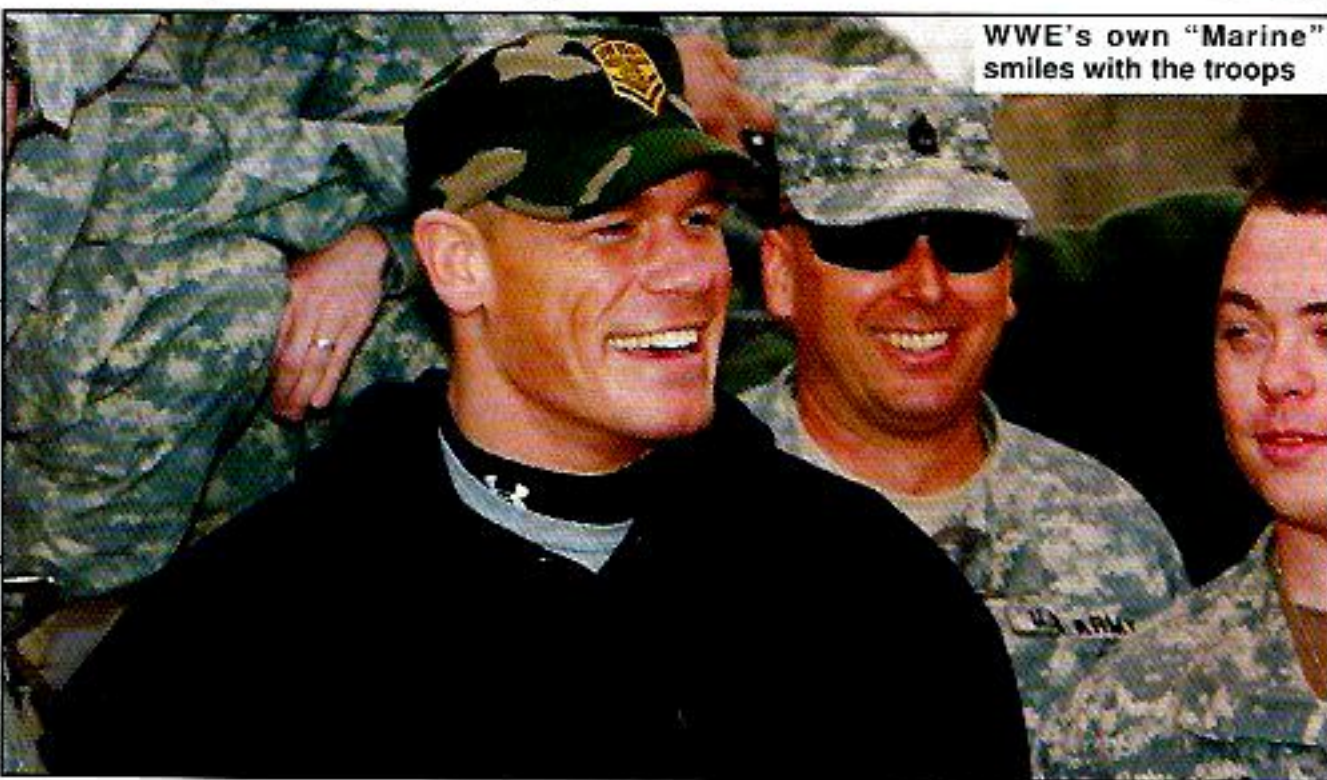
Although WWE wrestlers spread plenty of goodwill in the Middle East during the holiday season, Smackdown's Armageddon—at times—truly seemed like the end of days. The December 17 pay-per-view got off to a red-hot start, as **Kane** faced **Montel Vontavious Porter** in an inferno match. Porter was at an obvious disadvantage from the outset because, unlike Kane, he had never wrestled in a ring surrounded by fire. MVP tried to avoid the flames, and, when he finally mounted some offense, a yakuza kick to the head, the flames shot up into the air. Kane capitalized on Porter's lack of focus, dropping him with a big boot and a chokeslam. Eventually, Kane got really nasty, pushing MVP into the flames, catching his back on fire. MVP stumbled up the ramp with his back ablaze as emergency personnel rushed to put out the flames. Reportedly, MVP was rushed to a local hospital in Richmond, Virginia.

It looks as if Kane finally got even after losing a street-fight and a cage match to MVP in recent weeks.

Also at the event, **Joey Mercury** suffered a major injury during a four-way ladder match pitting **M-N-M** vs. **The Hardys** vs. **William Regal** and **Dave Taylor** vs. Smackdown World tag team champions **Brian Kendrick**

and **Paul London**. It happened when Jeff Hardy catapulted the ladder into Mercury's face. Blood poured out of Mercury's face as he gasped for air on the arena floor. Paramedics rushed to Mercury's aid, and he was rushed to the hospital while the match was ongoing. Before it was over, PPV viewers had seen more replays of Mercury's grisly hit than of the Kennedy assassination.

It turned out that the ladder had shattered the bridge of Mercury's nose and fractured the inside of his nose in four places. His injury required five



WWE's own "Marine" smiles with the troops

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***Kristal Marshall thanks the troops
... and the troops are thankful***

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Kane made MVP feel the burn

stitches on the inside of his nose and cheek and 15 stitches outside of his nose and cheek. He suffered from continual bleeding from his nose and eye for some time after the incident, and his left eye was still swollen shut as of press time. In blunt terms, the legs of the ladder had torn a hole down his nose and under his eye. Amazingly, he was stunned only momentarily.

"I've never been hit that hard in the face before," Mercury told *wwe.com*. "I'd have to say it felt like a 100-pound steel ladder connecting with my face at 100 miles per hour, or going head-first through a windshield of a car without a seatbelt on, or maybe getting hit in the face with a baseball bat swung by **Sammy Sosa**."

Kendrick and London ended up winning the match, extending their already seven-month title reign. But, if anyone deserves a rematch, it is M-N-M.

For fans anticipating a dream match between Raw World champion John Cena and Smackdown World champion **Batista**, there was no sign of that happening at Armageddon. WWE's two world champions dominated

King Booker and **Finlay** in the main event, with Batista planting Booker with a power bomb to win the match for his team after 11 minutes of action.

Cena and Batista displayed excellent teamwork and seemed to get along well during the match. The Raw champ received a mixed reaction, proving that the Smackdown champ may be more popular. But does that necessarily make Batista the bigger star? Come on, guys, hook it up at WrestleMania 23!

Also at Armageddon, The Undertaker beat **Ken Kennedy** in a "Last Ride" match ... Cruiserweight champion **Gregory Helms** pinned **Jimmy Wang Yang** ... U.S. champion **Chris Benoit** defeated **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **The Boogeyman** pinned **The Miz**.

On paper, Armageddon didn't appear to be an extraordinary pay-per-view, but, in terms of mat action, it turned out to be excellent. TNA's Turning Point—held on December 10—seemed more impressive on paper, and was a solid event as well. The heralded main event, of course, was the rematch between **Samoa Joe** and **Kurt Angle**.

Proving that pure wrestling is not dead, the crowd at the Impact Zone was really into Joe-Angle II. In fact, when Joe slipped out of Angle's "Olympic Slam" and sent Angle crashing into the referee, the fans' groans echoed throughout the arena. They wanted to see a clean winner. Angle, whose right ankle was heavily taped going into the match, tried to take a shortcut by grabbing a steel chair from the announcers' table. Back in the ring, Angle swung the chair, but it hid the top rope and smacked him in the face. Joe took down Angle by his straps and applied a rear naked choke. Angle was forced to submit at the 19-minute mark.

With Angle winning the first match via the anklelock, and Joe winning the second match via the rear naked choke, how about a submission match to break the tie?

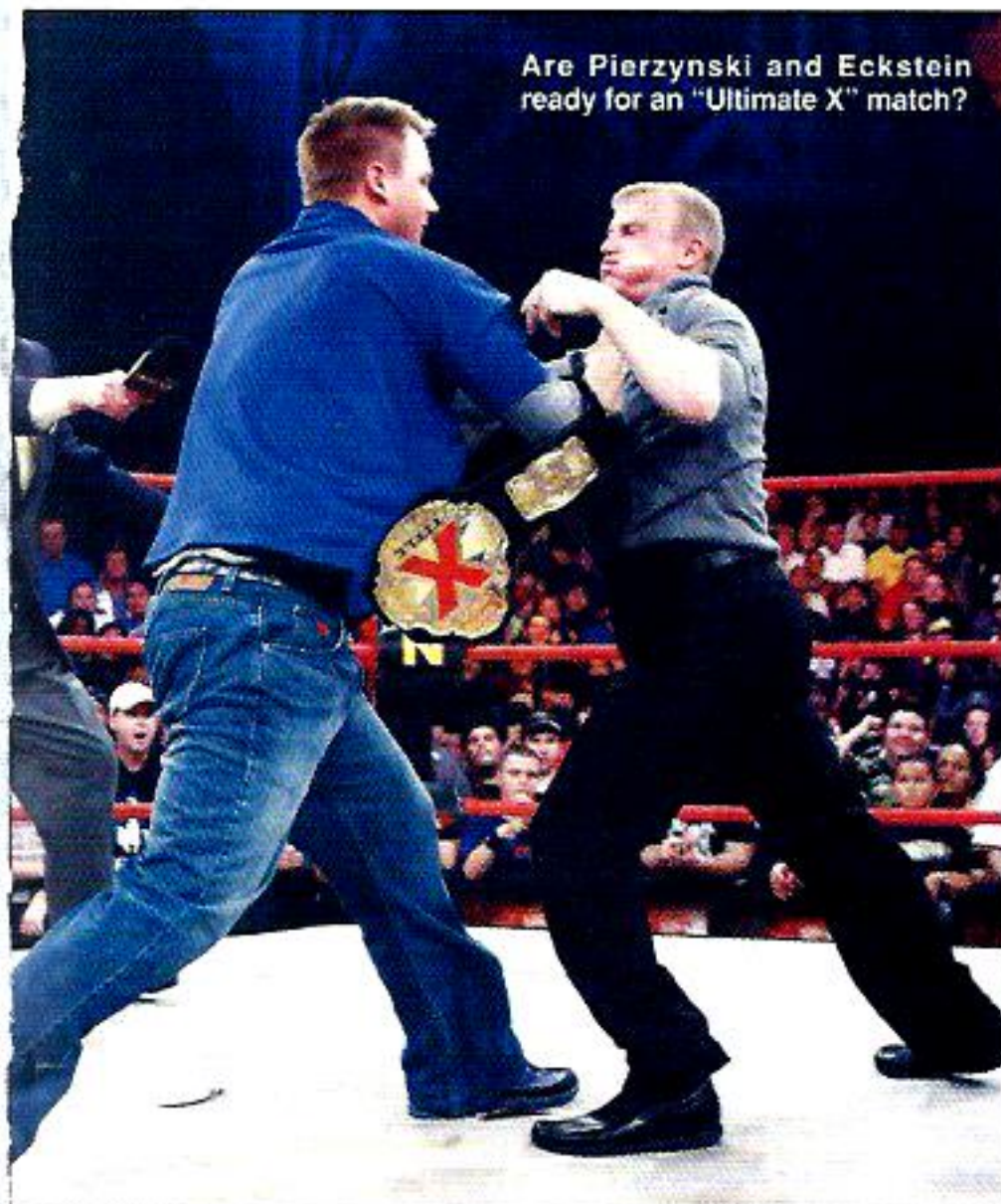
It didn't receive top billing, and it didn't approach the Joe-Angle bout, but NWA World champion **Abyss**' title defense against **Christian Cage** and **Sting** in a three-way match was ... well, interesting. Sting got the match off to a fast start when he sent Abyss and Cage flying to the arena floor, and then he dove over the top rope to land on top of them. Later, he rocked Abyss and Cage with clotheslines and "Stinger Splashes."

In the end, Abyss' manager, **James Mitchell**, and Cage's bodyguard, **Travis Tomko**, determined the outcome. As the battle raged on, Mitchell poured thumbtacks onto the mat, but Tomko knocked Abyss face-first into the tacks. Sting knocked Mitchell off the ring apron and tried to talk to Abyss. Cleverly, and somewhat deceitfully, Sting knocked down Abyss and applied the "Scorpion Deathlock." But Cage smashed Sting in the back of the head with a steel chair. That enabled the NWA World champion to execute the "Black-Hole Slam" on Sting and score the pinfall after 12 minutes of action.

TNA had better hope there are plenty of baseball fans in its PPV audience because one of the odder segments of Turning Point occurred when company official **Jim Cornette** introduced White Sox catcher **A.J. Pierzynski**

NEWS ANALYSIS

Are Pierzynski and Eckstein ready for an "Ultimate X" match?



and trainer **Dale Torborg**, along with St. Louis Cardinals shortstop and World Series MVP **David Eckstein**, who was accompanied by his brother, **Rick Eckstein**. Pierzynski came off like a heel, saying that Eckstein "backed into" a World Series victory and bragging about "winning" the X title a year earlier (TNA actually gave him a commemorative replica). When words became heated, Torborg punched Rick Eckstein, and Pierzynski and David Eckstein began shoving each other. **Lance Hoyt** ran into the ring to break up the "basebrawl."

Meanwhile, TNA fans chanted, "We want wrestling."

Also at Turning Point, NWA World tag team champions **The Latin American Exchange** beat **America's Most Wanted**, forcing **Chris Harris** and **James Storm** to split due to a prematch stipulation ... **A.J. Styles** defeated **Rhino** ... X champion **Christopher Daniels** pinned **Chris Sabin** (**Jerry Lynn** served as special referee) ... **Senshi** defeated **Sonjay Dutt**, **Jay Lethal**, **Alex Shelley**, and **Austin Starr** in a five-way elimination match.

For regular viewers of "As Louisville Turns," it was no doubt a surprise when **Cherry** sided with her old running buddies, **The Untouchables** (**Deuce** and **Domino**), to help them regain the OVW Southern tag team title from **Cody Runnels** and **Shawn Spears**. Cherry had left her abusive boyfriend, Deuce, and seemed to be in a happier relationship with Spears. But, as Spears and Deuce lay helpless during a title match in December, Cherry unlaced one of her trademark skates and nailed Spears with it. Deuce easily scored the pinfall to gain a third Southern tag team title

for his team. Cherry and Deuce celebrated with a kiss.

Paul Birchall and **Chet the Jet** never had a love affair, but their falling-out nearly turned violent. Birchall was set to face Ohio Valley champion **Jacob Duncan** in a televised main event when, just before the opening bell, former OVW champ Chet the Jet felled the giant Duncan with a steel chair and smashed him repeatedly with it. Grabbing the microphone, Birchall—who had considered Chet a

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES, VINCE.

Business Week had a few kind words for WWE Chairman Vince McMahon, regarding WWE's commitment to U.S. troops serving overseas: "Vince McMahon has become a modern-day Bob Hope ... Good thing, since he's one of the biggest names still visiting the troops. Early on, they could see stars such as Jessica Simpson, Kid Rock, and Bruce Willis." At least WWE gets some good press!

A MERCURY MIRACLE. Joey Mercury suffered a horrific injury at Armageddon, and, thank goodness, the only lasting effect may be cosmetic. It's surprising that Mercury wasn't knocked unconscious when the leg of that ladder struck him in the face. As bad as that injury was, he could have lost an eye or even worse. And Montel Vontavious Porter battling Kane in an inferno match? That's just asking for trouble.

JOE-ANGLE III? Many fans who watched the anticipated rematch between Samoa Joe and Kurt Angle thought their encounter at Turning Point was even better than their bout at Genesis. Joe and Angle were a bit more familiar with each other, and the second match was longer than the first. The crowd enjoyed both matches, and that may be a reason why *Impact's* ratings are improving. I can't wait for the third chapter in this rivalry.

DEATH BY HOMICIDE. Bryan Danielson's Ring of Honor title reign came to an end, thanks to Homicide, who has been an impact player in the promotion since its inception. I assume Danielson will take some much-needed time off to rehab his shoulder, and he seems to have ruled out a jump to WWE and TNA. I just have one piece of advice for the former champ: Don't grow that Highlander-type beard during this hiatus, please.

FAREWELL TO THE SPOILER. My memory of The Spoiler pertains to the end of his career, when the fearsome mystery man appeared in Georgia. There, he enjoyed two brief reigns as National champion, beating Brad Armstrong for the title both times. I remember he had a soft, gravelly voice and didn't shout during his interviews. That gave him a low-level intensity that made him very scary. Good luck in the great ring above, Spoiler.

friend—screamed, "What the hell do you think you're doing?!"

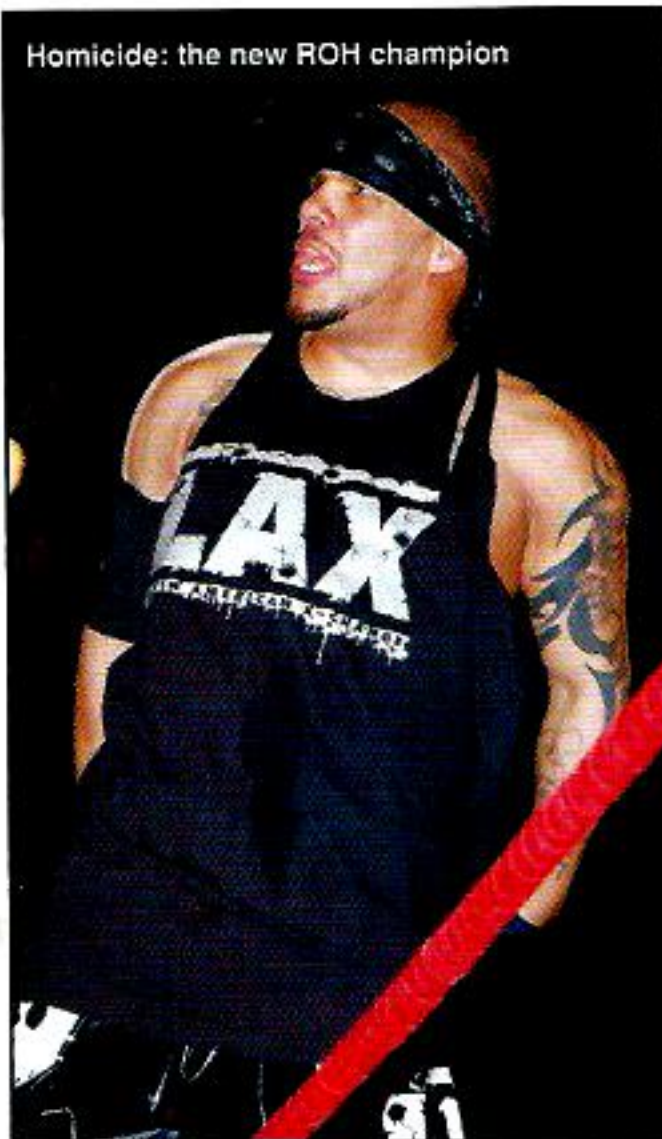
Chet responded by smacking Birchall with the same chair and declaring that he would defend the OVW belt against Birchall when—not if—he succeeded in beating Duncan.

Bryan Danielson had that kind of confidence when he won the Ring of Honor title in September 2005, and announced that his goal was to surpass Samoa Joe's historic 21-month title reign. It didn't happen. **Homicide**, a longtime regular in the promotion, captured the belt on December 23 at New York's Manhattan Center, ending Danielson's 15-month title reign. With that victory, Homicide became the eighth man to hold the ROH championship.

Danielson had shown signs of vulnerability in recent months. He separated his shoulder in August during a title unification match in which he won the ROH pure wrestling title from **Nigel McGuinness**. One physician advised Danielson to take a break and consider surgery, but another said it was okay for him to continue his title defenses while rehabilitating the injury.

Yet Danielson's performances weren't up to par. He lost

Homicide: the new ROH champion



a no-disqualification, non-title bout to Samoa Joe in October, and, on December 9, he was pinned by **Delirious** in an eight-man elimination match.

As a result, Danielson was no match for Homicide's brutal, hard-hitting offense on December 23. In the end, Homicide flattened Danielson with a wicked lariat to score the pinfall. Defending the ROH championship will be a challenge for Homicide, considering that he also holds the NWA World tag team title with **Hernandez**.

News from Combat Zone Wrestling: CZW held its annual "Cage Of Death" show on December 9 in Philadelphia, where **Nick Gage** defeated **Lobo**, **Lufisto**, and **Zandig** in the steel structure. Due to a prematch stipulation, Zandig must retire ... **Justice Pain** defeated **Chris Hero** and defending champ **Eddie Kingston** for the CZW title in a three-way match ... **Ruckus** con-

tinues to score wins in CZW and must be considered a contender for the heavyweight title in the near future.

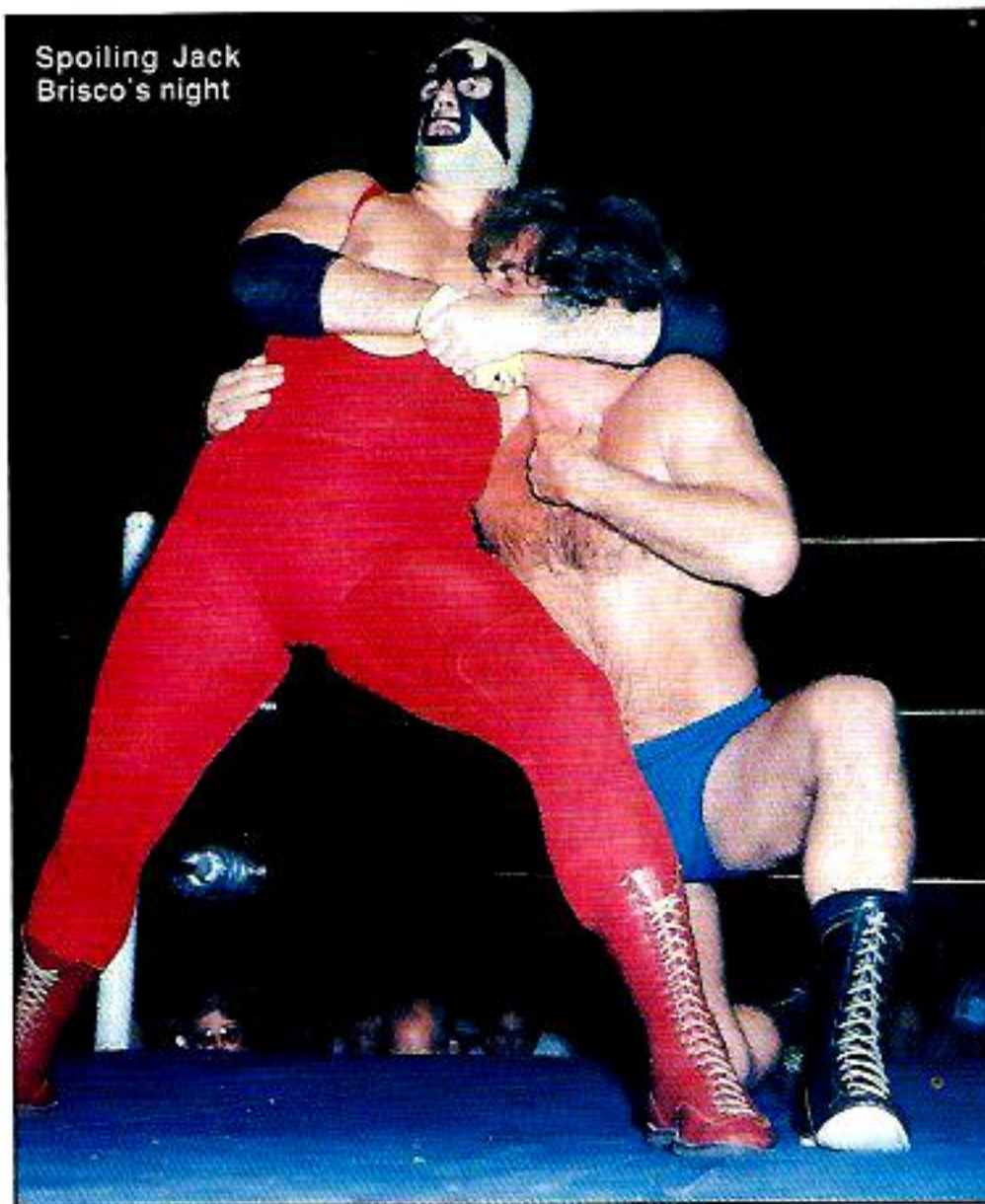
This 'n' that: Former WWF Intercontinental champion **Tito Santana** has taken the lead in organizing Camp IWF, a training school for the Independent Wrestling Federation and will be booking shows at the indy's home facility in West Paterson, New Jersey ... WWE has released **Danny Doring** from the ECW roster ... *Impact* is gaining some traction in the prime time ratings, now scoring an average of 1.1 as of late ... The real rivalry between Alex Shelley and Chris Sabin appears to not be happening in TNA, but in Maryland Championship Wrestling, where Shelley recently won the Rage TV title from Sabin.

From the Blame Game Dept.: WWE was exonerated in a court ruling in Germany, where a 19-year-old man attacked a homeless man and left him to die. The accused blamed the new *WWE Smackdown vs. Raw* video game for his violent outburst. Then again, maybe it had something to do with the 19-year-old consuming one bottle of beer, two bottles of wine, and one bottle of chocolate liqueur before the incident. He also had a history of alcoholism and violence.

Unfortunately, we have another death to report, that of **The Spoiler**. **Don Jardine**, the man behind the mask, died on December 16 after a long battle with leukemia. He was one of the most famous masked wrestlers of the 1960s and '70s, known for his dreaded clawhold and his ability to walk along the top rope, long before The Undertaker.

We send our condolences to his family, including his wife, **Becky Jardine**, and his many friends. □

Spoiling Jack Brisco's night



data sheet

MONTEL VONTAVIOUS PORTER

HEIGHT: 6'3"

WEIGHT: 252

HOMETOWN: Miami, FL

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: November 21, 2006—beating Kane in a steel cage match on Smackdown. Although Porter needed help from Ken Kennedy to win the match, any victory—no matter how tainted—is truly impressive against “The Big Red Machine.” Interestingly, MVP also defeated Kane in a streetfight a few weeks earlier.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: MVP carries himself like a star. Prior to his in-ring debut on Smackdown, MVP was seen with a full entourage, including several lovely ladies, while negotiating a contract with General Manager Theodore R. Long. He touted himself as the sport’s hottest free agent. And, even though he wasn’t, he seemed to be.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: Unlike his ally, Mr. Kennedy, MVP has failed to make a connection with the audience. They don’t love him or hate him enough to muster much passion for his character. His promos must become stronger and more frequent before he can truly become Smackdown’s MVP.

PET FINISHER: “Most Valuable Moonsault” (split-legged moonsault)

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: According to WWE sources, MVP had to be rushed to a local hospital in Richmond, Virginia, after Kane threw him into the flames during their “Inferno” match at Armageddon. Not only is this MVP’s first major loss since joining Smackdown, but it is also the first time he has had to overcome a physical setback.

OUTLOOK FOR 2007: MVP has made a wise choice by aligning himself with Mr. Kennedy, who is probably the hottest mid-carder on Smackdown. Together, Porter and Kennedy could dominate the brand within a few months.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: “That Inferno match at Armageddon should have never taken place. MVP is the greatest free agent that WWE has ever signed, and I think this company should start protecting their investment. He is certain to become a main-eventer.”

—John Bradshaw Layfield



data sheet

ERIC YOUNG

HEIGHT: 6'

WEIGHT: 218

HOMETOWN: Vancouver, British Columbia

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: October 22, 2006—defeating Larry Zbyszko at Bound for Glory. TNA's director of authority had forced Young out of the company, but TNA official Jim Cornette ordered Zbyszko to wrestle Young in a "Loser Gets Fired" match. It was a great victory because Young got his job back and beat a "Living Legend."

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Young plays dumb so very, very well. That's why opponents like Zbyszko have underestimated him and ended up losing to him. And this whole stupid gimmick has rallied the fans to his side. But is this dumb act just a wily ruse? That's hard to say, but there is a rumor that he was the valedictorian of his high school class.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: He needs some quality matches. Young wrestled a retired wrestler (Zbyszko) at Bound for Glory and competed in a swimsuit competition (against Ms. Brooks) at Turning Point. His SpongeBob SquarePants boxers helped him win the competition, but that won't put him in X title contention.

PET FINISHER: The "Showstopper" (a side wheelbarrow suplex)

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: It was uncertain how Young would fare after Team Canada was disbanded on July 14, but he has remained more of a consistent presence in TNA than any of his teammates, including Robert Roode, Petey Williams, and A-1 Ralphz. He has overcome this hurdle, even to the point that Roode wants to be his tag team partner.

OUTLOOK FOR 2007: Portraying an intelligence-deficient wrestling character can get plenty of laughs from the crowd in the short-term, but it is a gimmick with a short shelf life. Just ask Eugene. There may come a time when Young isn't that special anymore.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "I can tell you first-hand that Eric is a really smart guy. Maybe he just doesn't want that to come across on TV. But he's very smart in the ring, and, in this business, that's all that matters."

—Sonjay Dutt



on the road

With Dave Lenker

IF BOBBY LASHLEY represents today's ECW and C.M. Punk represents the future of ECW, then what exactly does Rob Van Dam represent in the dead of the winter of 2007?

Somewhat sadly, the answer seems to be the past of ECW. Not so much in the way Shane Douglas, Raven, Tazz, and Johnny Hotbody represent the *distant* past of ECW, but the past nonetheless.

What a shame.

Now, whether ECW even has much of a future within WWE is fodder for a debate for another time in another issue, but, assuming it does, where does RVD fit in? I'm not sure. I wonder if even Van Dam has much of an idea. I wonder if Vince McMahon even gives it any thought anymore. I'm inclined to think he doesn't.

The December to Dismember pay-per-view figured to

tell us a lot about ECW. It wasn't a huge secret that The Big Show was on his way to retirement, Hiatus-ville, TNA, Parts Unknown, or who knows where else shortly after the pay-per-view, so a new champion was going to be crowned inside the "Elimination Chamber." But I also wanted to know if there was anything WWE could do in Augusta, Georgia (not exactly vintage ECW country), to generate a little buzz around ECW. And given that the rest of the card, with the possible exception of The Hardy Boyz vs. M-N-M, wasn't even worth announcing (or perhaps even putting together) ahead of time, the "Elimination Chamber" had to be pretty spectacular if that was going to happen.

It wasn't bad, but spectacular? That would be a stretch, and a pretty big one at that.

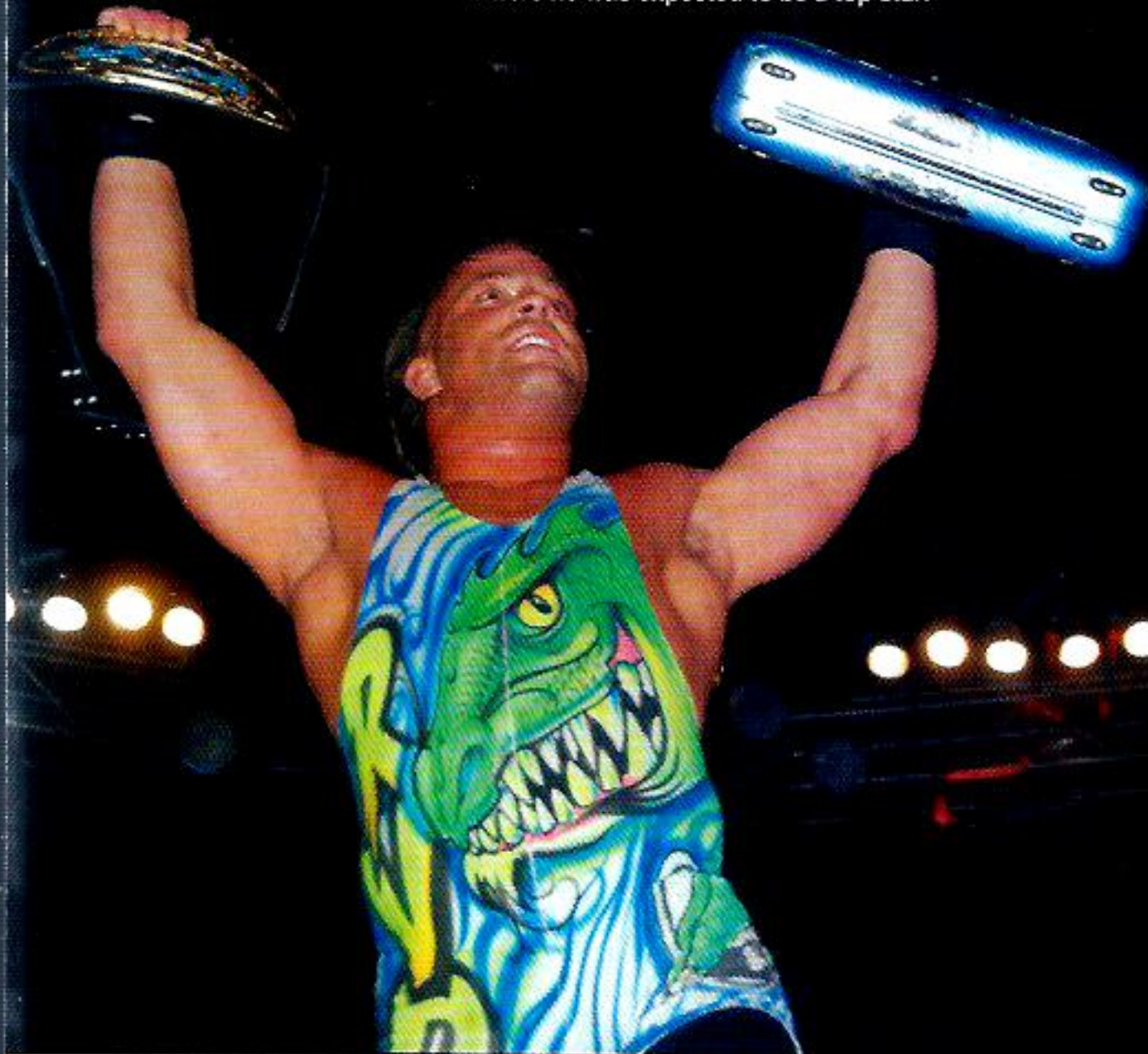
Lashley proved himself a worthy ECW champion, I think, but I doubt RVD had any interest in hanging around for the locker room celebration.

How do I know RVD is no longer the present or future of ECW? He was the third man eliminated in the six-way main event—and Test was the one who eliminated him. It seemed as if the energy drained out of the building after RVD was caught looking up at the lights for those three seconds, but that also might have had something to do with Punk going out early, too. It also felt like a real turning point in Van Dam's WWE career, and not a good one. I wonder how many others felt, like I did, that this represented WWE finally giving up on him.

Was it really just six months earlier that RVD beat John Cena in front of a rabid ECW crowd to win the Raw World title and ended up with two gold straps laid across his shoulders?

Last summer, RVD losing in the main event of a WWE-produced ECW PPV might have sparked a mini-riot. He had to win that match with Cena, if you know what I mean. On the first Sunday night in December, RVD was almost an

Rob Van Dam was not only the top name in ECW, but also on Raw. A traffic stop and a 30-day suspension later, Van Dam has become a mid-carder in ECW, where he was expected to be a top star.



afterthought. Time to rally behind Mr. Punk perhaps.

It's funny, but when the two men teamed at the very next ECW TV taping, it seemed like Van Dam was getting the rub from being in the ring with Punk, a young man with talent and potential, but a man who has yet to accomplish anything of note at a level higher than Ring of Honor. If RVD ever really had the torch in his hands in WWE, this would have been a time to pass it.

The easy thing to do would be to blame RVD's de-push on that little problem with the law that he and his good buddy and fellow free spirit, Sabu, had after an ECW house show last summer. Within a couple of days, he went from being the Raw World and ECW champion to being a guy with free time on his hands at home as he served a 30-day suspension.

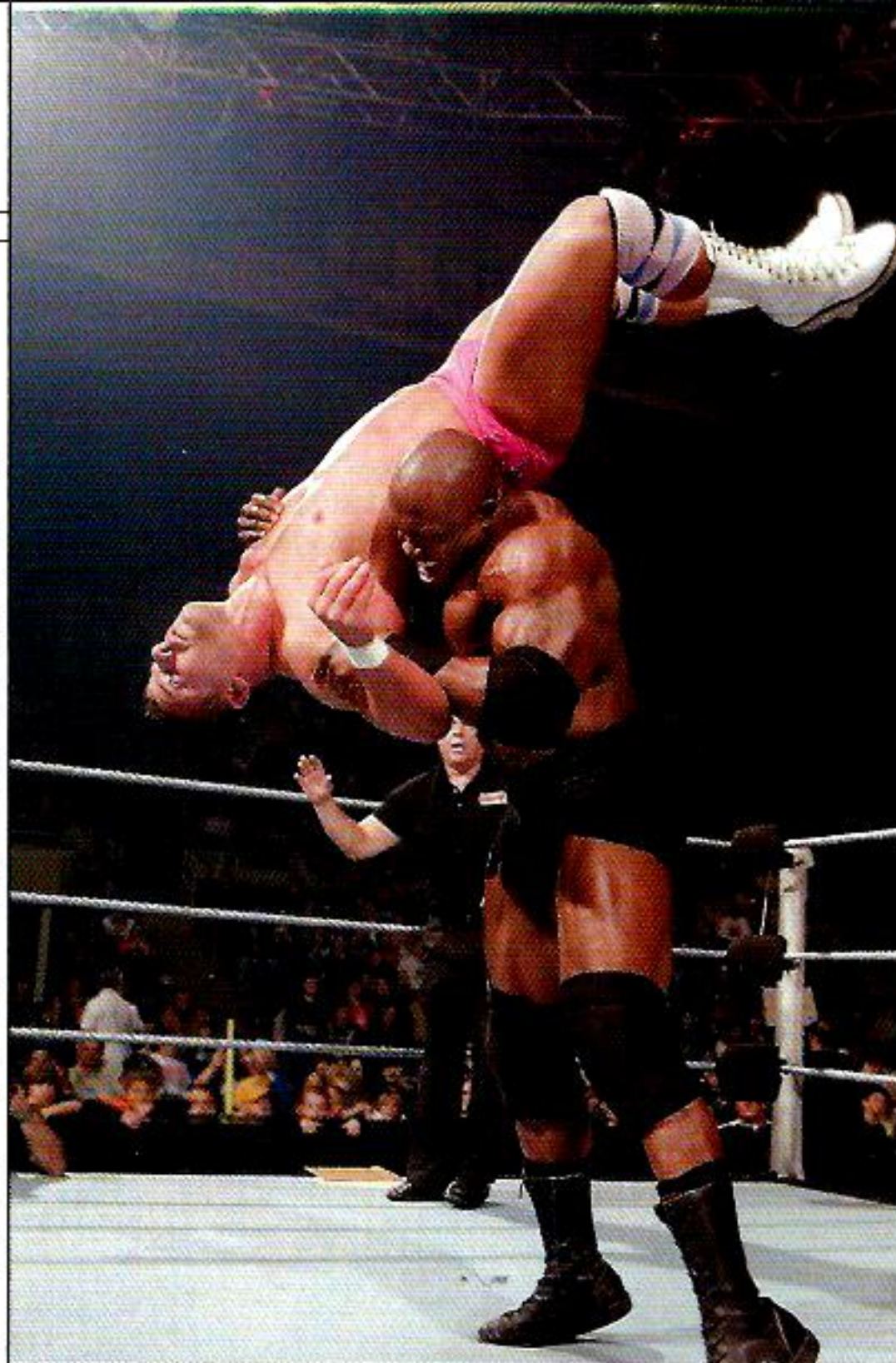
Of course, that had something—maybe a whole lot—to do with his demotion, but I have to wonder whether some people in the company were glad to see him screw up. It was a convenient way to show he was unreliable.

Van Dam knows he has probably cost himself a bigger push in WWE since he joined the company a half-decade ago by being so honest, so outspoken, so flippant, and so much like the guy you see on TV on the rare occasions he is handed a microphone. RVD knows he's made some enemies, probably a few that you don't want to make when you're a WWE wrestler.

He knows, and he doesn't care. He's Rob ... Van ... Dam.

WWE had a chance to do a lot with RVD when he signed on as a member of the WCW/ECW Alliance and—despite his lack of a push—became very popular in 2001. But it didn't. WWE had a chance to do something when he finally feuded with Triple-H a few years later. Remember how that turned out? The company could have done big things with him after he returned after a year of rehabbing his surgically repaired knee. No thanks.

Who would have thought that RVD's nearly two-year reign as ECW TV champion would really be the high point of his career? Even that didn't work out very well for him. When it appeared that a mega-showdown with ECW World champion Mike Awesome was finally starting to come together, RVD broke his ankle, Awesome took the money and sprinted to WCW, and everything fell apart.



Bobby Lashley is becoming the driving force of the new brand. Dave Lenker believes that some people inside WWE never really wanted to give Van Dam a chance, but, obviously, those same people think Lashley has more potential to be a major star.

Now he's stumbling back into what appears to be a mid-card role in a mini-promotion that, with no house shows, only two PPVs per year, and only an hour of TV per week, really doesn't have much of a mid-card. What a shame. Punk rising up to challenge RVD for the ECW title feels a lot more intriguing than Punk vs. Lashley.

If ECW does fold again, and that seems like a decent possibility right now, where does that leave Van Dam? A feud with Eugene seems more likely than a feud with Batista.

I remember our passionate debate over who deserved the top spot in the "PWI 500" in 1999. In the office, we were split pretty evenly between RVD and Steve Austin. My side, the "Stone-Cold" side, ultimately won out. I probably didn't fully appreciate RVD's skills at that time. But, in time, I did. I still do. I respect his candor as well. One of these days, he may get frustrated enough and talk himself out of a job with WWE. It wouldn't surprise me.

Maybe RVD in TNA? Maybe he could be a big part of somebody's future yet. □

By Brandi Mankiewicz

(The opinions expressed in "The Insider" are those of Brandi Mankiewicz alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of anyone else on the staff of this magazine.)

IT'S BEEN A rough few weeks in my world, so bear with me. I've spent more time dealing with a family situation than watching any form of TV. Hell, I don't even have a computer with me most days. I'd apologize if I thought it was necessary, but it isn't. There are times in life when family must come first—even before wrestling. Take that lesson to heart, you Internet smarks. While I'd rather be in touch with everyone, it's also a much-needed rest from pro wrestling. I came back to surreality and logged on to the Internet and started trolling for the

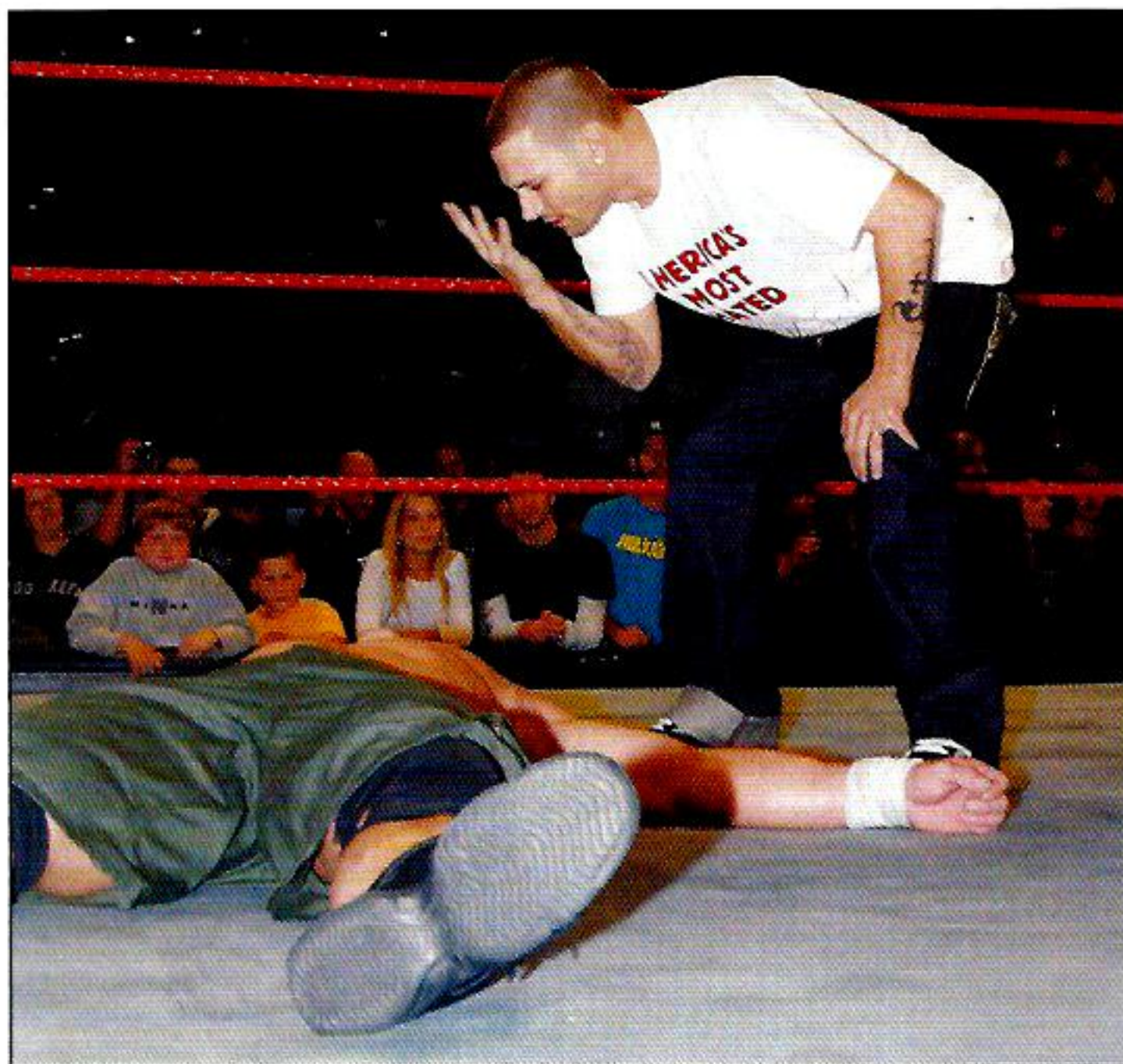
news I've missed. I noticed that Kevin Federline is mentioned on a number of message boards with the threads mainly talking about his involvement with John Cena.

Excuse me, but what the hell happened while I was away? Why is Britney Spears' soon-to-be ex even near a wrestling ring without a ticket for the front row?

Wrestling is notorious for having celebrities of all lists, from A to Z, come out for special appearances. Some even get involved as valets or managers, but most are not stupid enough to step in the ring. Apparently, K-Fed is stupid. Not that I gave him much credence before this. He obviously isn't a Harvard-grad. He isn't even a (Dusty) Rhodes scholar at this point.

I am sick of so-called celebrities getting involved in wrestling. Just because everyone thinks it's easy to do this wrestling thing doesn't mean that it is. It takes a lot of skill to do what wrestlers do. I really don't want to see any of these celebrities get hurt ... only because it would give wrestling a bad name. You don't see K-Fed strolling onto the field at any NFL game for a play or three, do ya? I'd love to see him don some skates and try his hand at hockey. Better yet, curling. That way only Canadians and weirdos from those very northern states who wear way too much flannel will see him. They deserve this fruit loop.

Now, I do realize that John Cena sort of stepped on Federline's toes by displaying his crappy rap "ability" ...



"America's Most Hated," Kevin Federline, is currently embroiled in an impassioned quarrel—and we're not talking about the custody battle with his soon-to-be ex, Ms. Spears. Cena may be the only one able to shut up the quick-lipped Federline.

but then, Federline stepped on the toes of anyone who likes rap music by putting out his own rap album. I guess that makes them even. Cena at least has presence and a reason for being near the ring. Federline, not so much.

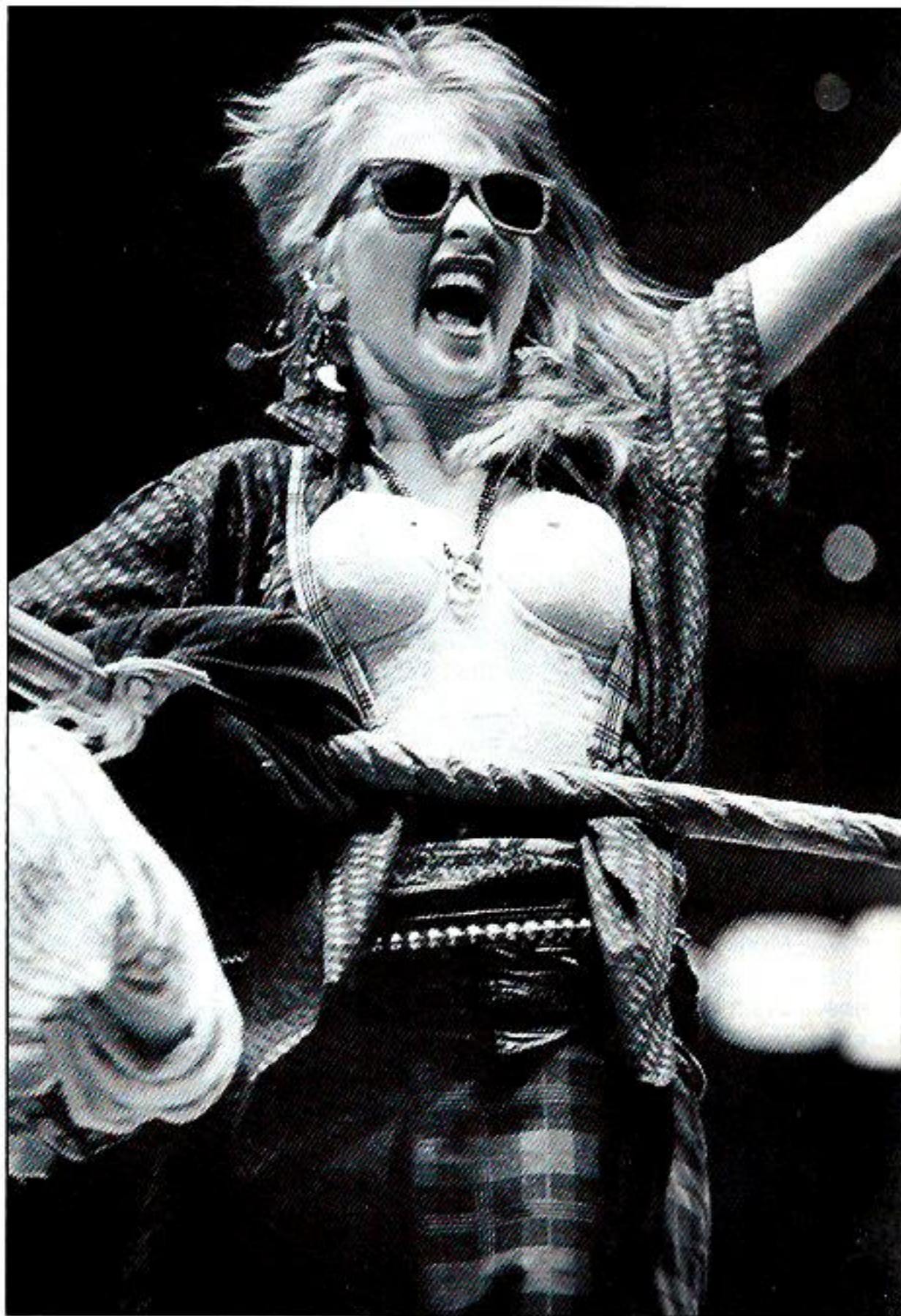
The closest I'd let him near a ring would be for putting one up and tearing it down. I'm sure Vince McMahon thinks this whole thing is a good idea, since Kevin is notorious in the entertainment industry. Vinnie Mac may be hoping to get some more publicity from it. Unfortunately, it's not the type of pub WWE needs. Sure, WWE went to Iraq for another Christmas show, and that'll barely be mentioned on any news channels, but that's okay. Wait, it was mentioned on Fox News, but who really watches that? Vince needs to realize that doing charitable things for no recognition is good for the Karma. Doing stupid things just for publicity is bad for it.

Of course, many stars have been near the WWE ring for no good reason, but it was usually at WrestleMania. The presence of Ice-T, Cyndi Lauper, or Liberace was supposed to make it seem like a world-class event (no, not of the Von Erich kind). Even ECW, version 1.0, tried it with their own brand of celebrity: Jenna Jameson. Okay, she might not be as mainstream as some of Vince's celebs, but I bet she's starred in more videos than the others.

The worst part of the K-Fed situation is that I really, really can't stand John Cena. This whole rap feud thing will be like the last presidential election: Both choices suck. Cena grates my nerves with his whole being. I truly can't find one redeeming quality about him. Funny, I feel the same about Federline.

It's settled: I think I'll boycott this feud. I'm in a lose-lose situation here.

If Kevin Federline actually does something athletic and somehow gets one over on Cena, I'll have to puke because it's him. If Cena beats Kevin to a pulp, it's expected and does nothing to advance his career. Hell, at this point, Cena might be better off smacking around Britney Spears. At least that would be real news. □



K-Fed isn't the first pop culture celebrity to invade a wrestling ring, but at least most of his predecessors were famous by their own merits, not by association. Exhibit A: Miss Cyndi Lauper, '80s songstress/quirky trendsetter/Wendi Richter's manager.

HE'S BEEN CALLED the "King Of Indies" because of his prolific appearances on the independent circuit, but don't be fooled: "The Fallen Angel" Christopher Daniels has played with the big boys of WCW, WWE, and TNA ... Got his start in a Chicago-based independent promotion, Windy City Wrestling ... Traveled around the world, often under a mask and using the name "Curry Man" ... Holds the honor of being the only man to ever win the East Coast Wrestling Association's prestigious Super 8 Tournament twice ... Held championships in the ECWA, New Japan, Ultimate Pro Wrestling, All Pro Wrestling, and several other regional promotions ... By the late-1990s, began wrestling for the WWF, appearing under a mask as part of the tag team "Los Conquistadores" ... Occasionally appeared as "The Fallen Angel," competing in the light heavyweight division ... Unsuccessfully challenged Taka Michinoku for the light heavyweight belt on *Shotgun Saturday Night* ... By the early-2000s, had continued to impress fans with his indy wrestling, and gained the attention of World Championship Wrestling ... Appeared on a January 2001 edition of *WCW Monday Nitro*, wrestling Michael Modest ... Although their match was interrupted by Scott Steiner, Daniels and Modest were offered short trial contracts with WCW ... Still considered one of the founding fathers of Ring of Honor, having wrestled in the main event of the company's first show against Low-Ki and American Dragon Bryan Danielson ... A short time later, formed a stable of wrestlers called "The Prophecy" ... Their mission was to destroy ROH ... The Prophecy feuded with several ROH main-

stays, including the Second City Saints faction, led by C.M. Punk ... Has remained a member of the ROH family, continuing to compete for the company for the past four years (*"Ring of Honor is my home. I know everyone there, and, more importantly, have beaten everyone there"*) ... In 2002, with the formation of Total Nonstop Action, again found himself in a new, up-and-coming pro-



While fighting for the NWA tag team championship, Christopher Daniels became embroiled in a feud with The Latin American Exchange, a battle that continued even after Daniels broke from tag team partner A.J. Styles.

motion ... With greater national exposure in TNA, performed for a wider audience than he had since the end of WCW ... Won the NWA tag team championship with partners Low-Ki and Elix Skipper ... Was also a member of Vince Russo's short-lived stable, Sports Entertainment Xtreme ... By 2004, two years after joining TNA, Daniels had broken out on his own, wrestling for TNA's popular X division ... Won the coveted World X Cup as part of Team USA, along with Jerry Lynn, Chris Sabin, and

Elix Skipper ... His high-flying, intense ring style made him popular with fans as he feuded with A.J. Styles over the X title ... Beat Styles in a controversial finish at Destination X 2005 and held the belt for five months ... Lost the belt back to Styles ... Following his loss to Styles, began feuding with Samoa Joe ... Joe and Daniels had faced each other several times in ROH, but their feud proved more dangerous in TNA ... Joe gave Daniels a concussion, putting him out of action ... Returned to TNA to protect Styles from a similar Joe-driven fate ... Though temporarily aligned with Styles, Daniels renewed his feud with his longtime rival ... Styles and Daniels fought each other in an effort to become the number-one contender for the X belt held by Samoa Joe ... Daniels captured the title in an Ultimate X match, but lost the belt back to Samoa Joe ... Through 2006, continued to compete for Ring of Honor, winning the promotion's tag team championship with Matt Sydal ... Held the NWA tag team belts with on-again/off-again rival A.J. Styles ... In November 2006, won his third X championship in TNA by beating his now-former partner Styles and Chris Sabin in a three-way dance, one of the headlining matches of *Impact's* prime time debut on Spike TV (*"I proved my dominance by being in the main event and winning the X division title on the prime time debut. Everyone in TNA and Ring of Honor now knows who rules the world—'The Fallen Angel'!"*) ... With a career spanning more than a decade, and after winning championships in nearly every promotion in wrestling, Daniels has proven to be one of the most durable competitors in the sport. □



CHRISTOPHER DANIELS

334

By Scott Teal

Baron Von Raschke

Unlike his wrestling persona, Jim Raschke is a humble man who doesn't like to be the center of attention.

Born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1940, Jim went to Omaha North High School, where he played football, wrestled, and ran track. Later, he went on to play football and wrestle for the University of Nebraska, where he was a two-time All-American. He earned a degree in zoology, graduating in '63. That same year, he won a bronze medal at the World Games in Helsingborg, Sweden, placing third to Russia and Sweden. It was only the second time that an American placed in Greco-Roman wrestling.

One year later, Jim won the Olympic trials, but three days before leaving for Tokyo, Japan, he was injured during a workout when his opponent put an illegal hold on him. The pressure hyper-extended his elbow and caused him to lose his berth on the Olympic team.

In 1965, a friend took Jim to a TV taping in New York. "Dr. Jerry Graham was the featured performer that day," said Raschke. "The show intrigued me so much that I kept watching. When I got out of the Army, I got a job teaching in Omaha and forgot about pro wrestling."

That spring, Jim placed second in a national tournament in both the Greco-Roman and freestyle divisions. "I didn't make much money in my first year of teaching junior high school ... \$5,150. I contacted Joe Dusek, the promoter in Omaha, and he invited me to a live taping. It was there that he introduced me to Verne Gagne."

While he was in training, Jim took the ring to the towns, set up the ring, and refereed the matches. "My first actual

match was in Milwaukee against Johnny Kace," he recalled. "I was nervous, of course, but he put me through the paces. Everybody said the match was good for somebody with my experience. My second match was with Billy Red Cloud. Once again, we had a terrific match. I thought, *Hey, this is a piece of cake!* My third match was with a guy named Juan Zendejas. We went out there, and it was just a complete stinkeroo—just a terrible, terrible match. Then I went back to refereeing a lot ... because Verne happened to see the match."

Mad Dog Vachon gets the credit for coming up with the idea of Jim portraying a German villain. "Mad Dog wanted me to be his partner in Quebec. He wanted me to call myself Baron Von Pumpkin. It really wasn't a bad name because it would give people something to yell about, but I thought it was ridiculous. I kind of liked my last name, anyway, so we decided on Baron Von Raschke."

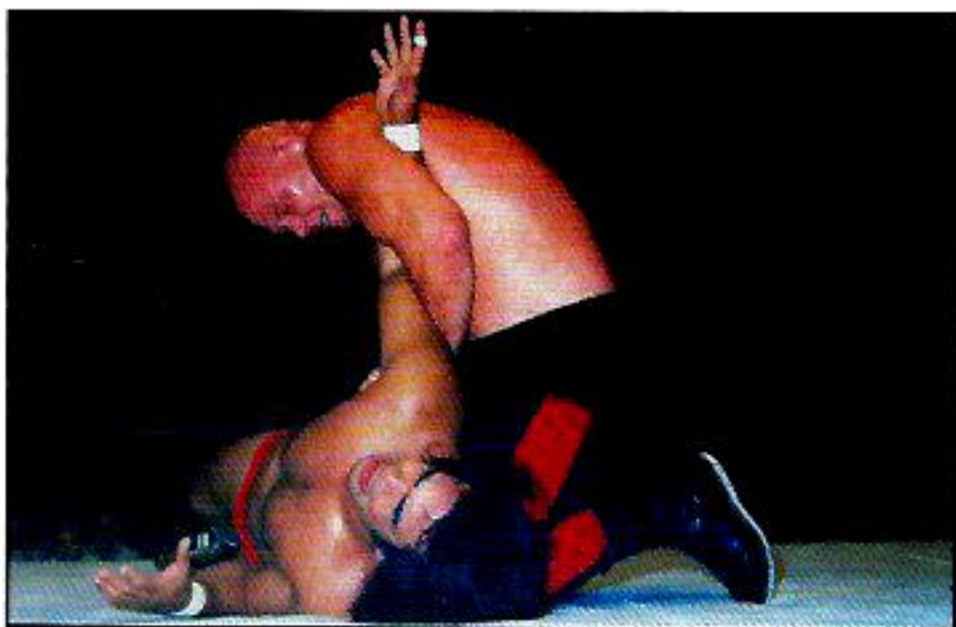
Baron Von Raschke became one of the most hated villains to ply their trade in the ring, inciting riots in arenas throughout Canada. His claw became one of the most feared and talked about holds in wrestling. "There's a funny story about how that hold came to be," explained Raschke. "I was wrestling Pat O'Connor at the Kiel Auditorium in St. Louis. During the match, he said, 'Put the claw on me.' I asked, in a whisper, 'What's the claw?' He guided me through it and it seemed to get over pretty good, so I used it from then on."

After terrorizing opponents in the ring for more than 20 years, the Baron retired from wrestling and became a substitute teacher in Burnsville, Minnesota, and while also working as a monorail driver at the zoo. During the summer months, he and his wife (who he refers to as "Mrs. Claw") operate a business dealing with souvenirs and lawn ornaments.

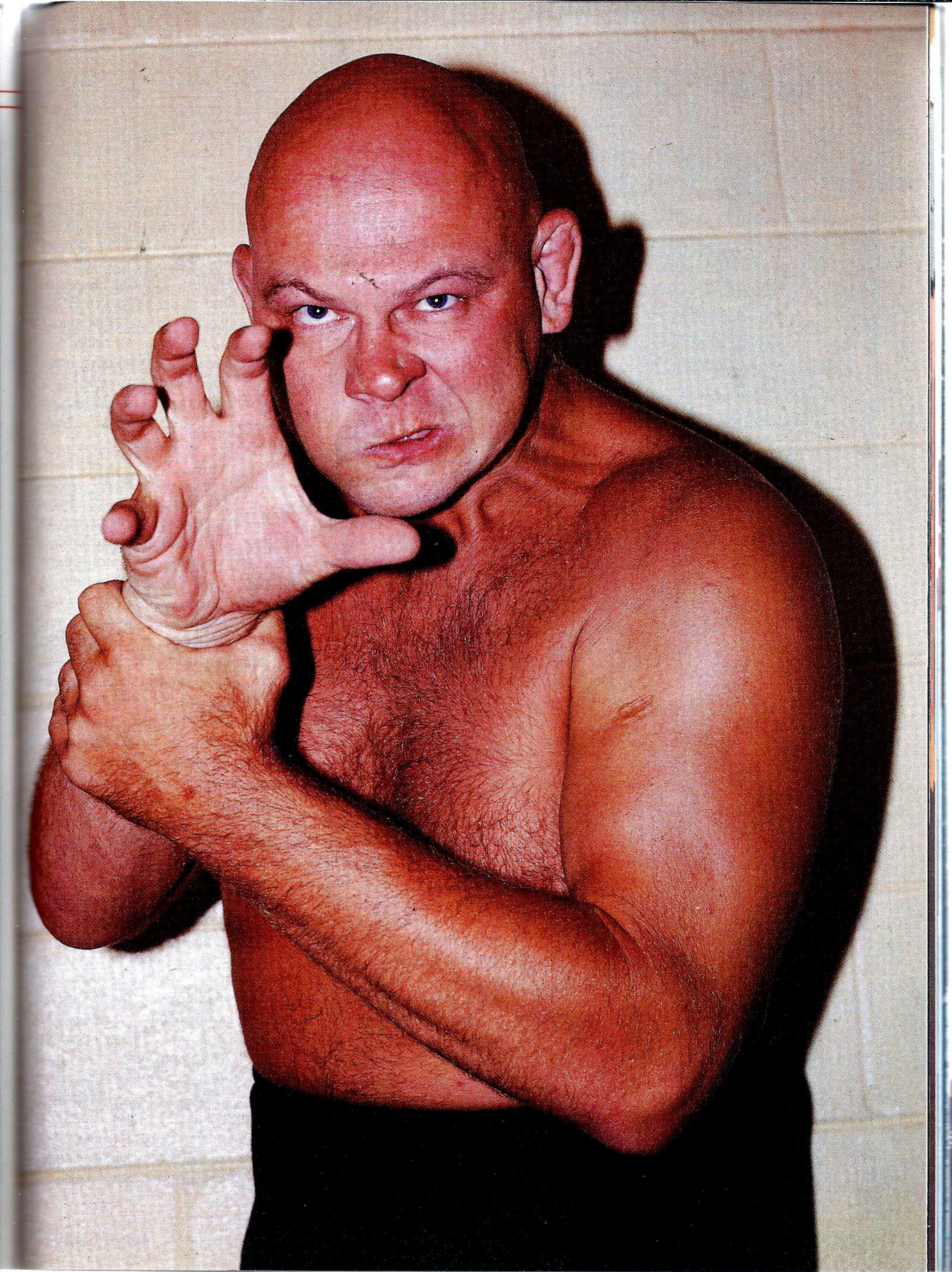
Today, the Baron makes appearances at autograph signings, baseball games, fundraisers, state fairs, wrestling shows and conventions, high schools, and just about anywhere somebody will book him. In November 2006, he even rode on a float in a Christmas parade held in Grafton, Wisconsin.

When asked if he had anything else to say before we ended our interview, he shouted his famous phrase in the Baron's voice, "That's all you need to know!"

(Scott Teal publishes the newsletter "Whatever Happened To ...?" He can be reached at P.O. Box 2781, Hendersonville, TN 37077-2781. Web site: www.1wrestlinglegends.com.)



Baron Von Raschke is a modest man who doesn't brag about his accomplishments, such as his ability to make Rick Steamboat scream in agony in this October 1977 match. Steamboat should just be glad Von Raschke didn't use his famous claw!



With Matt Brock

Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor



PAUL HEYMAN

AUGUSTA, GA: I'm still having trouble figuring out exactly what the new ECW is. It's been billed as a third WWE brand, independent of Raw and Smackdown, but now that ECW house shows have been eliminated, ECW really only exists as a TV show taped during Smackdown tapings. ¶December to Dismember was ECW's first pay-per-view since becoming a WWE brand, and it was an opportunity for the brand to establish itself. Unfortunately, despite Bobby Lashley being

crowned its new champion, December to Dismember muddied the extreme waters more than ever. ¶First, the good: Lashley has the potential to be one of wrestling's megastars within the next couple of years. He has the raw potential, but still needs a bit more seasoning, and an injection of charisma wouldn't hurt. The event also featured four solid tag teams in the reunited Hardy Boyz, the reunited M-N-M, the underutilized Full-Blooded Italians, and the promising Sylvester Terkay and Elijah Burke. ¶The bad outweighed the good, however. The Sandman—arguably the biggest star in ECW history—was relegated to a measly run-in. Sabu was pulled off the show at the last minute in a bush-league bait-and-switch move. And while Lashley has potential, C.M. Punk is red hot. Lashley winning the title puts a huge roadblock between Punk

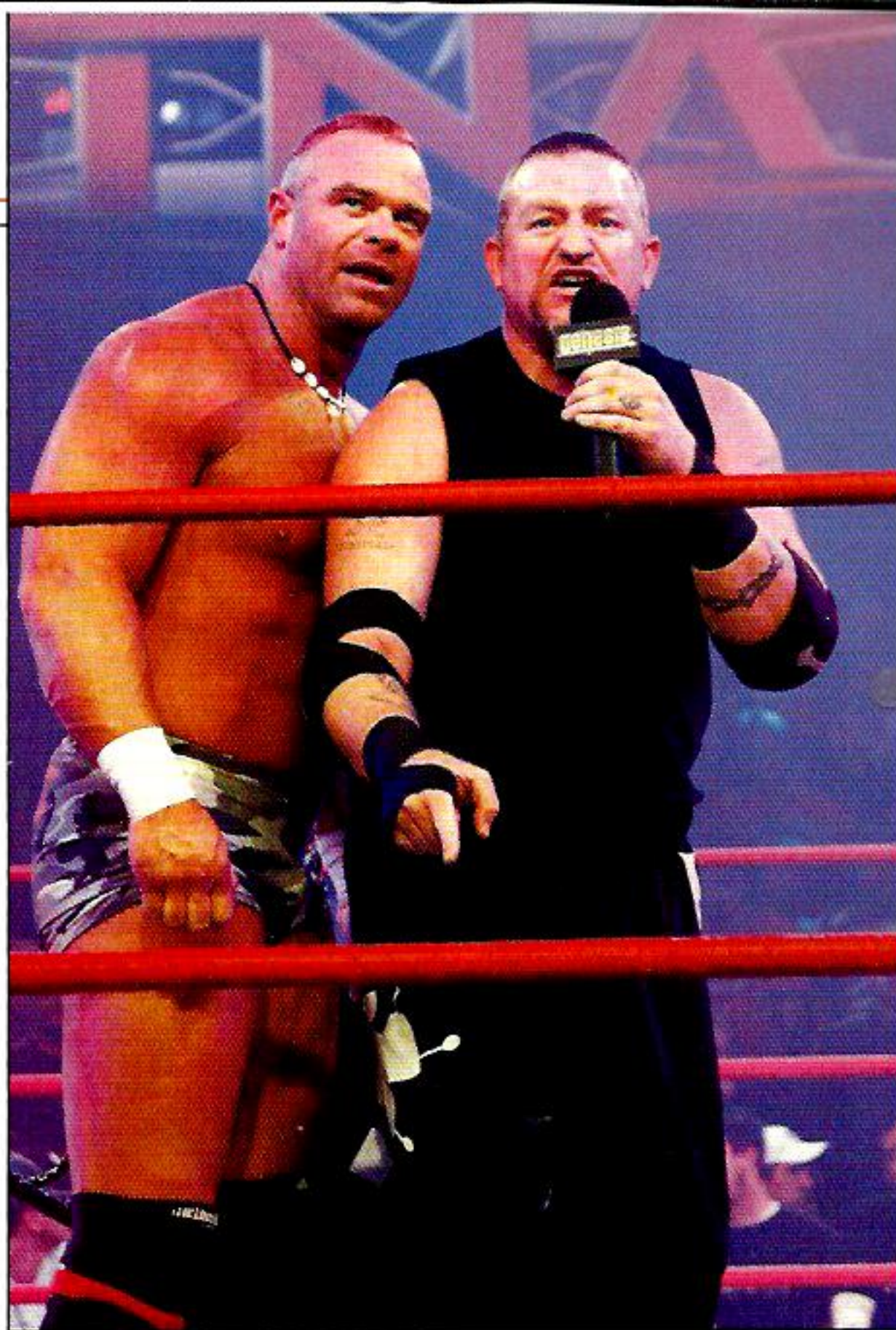
and the ECW title. ¶Worst of all, Paul Heyman—the architect of ECW—was relieved of his duties after the show because of clash with Vince McMahon. Without Heyman, WWE should really drop the ECW moniker once and for all. Having lost Heyman and the extreme edge, the ECW label is actually holding back the new brand. To be viewed as a truly fresh alternative, ECW would have been better off without the baggage of those three letters.

LOUISVILLE, KY: Trish Stratus is out filming a reality show and has no intention of returning to the ring. Lita is playing punk rock music and has no intention of returning to the ring. For the first time in the past few years, the WWE women's division looks wide open. The title is there for the taking. ¶So why are Beth Phoenix, Katie Lea, Serena, and ODB still stuck down in Louisville? And what's the deal with WWE's most dominant Diva, Victoria? ¶Back in June on Raw, Victoria slapped Phoenix hard enough to fracture her jaw. When I talked to Beth a few days after that incident, she told me she was trying to get a doctor to sign off on allowing her to wrestle with some type of protective face shield. Regardless of the pain and the risk of aggravating the injury, she had come so close to realizing her life's dream that she was willing to take the risk to compete for the women's title. She has been cleared to wrestle for more than two months now, but has yet to return to Raw as of this writing. ¶At an OVW TV taping here, she faced OVW women's champ Katie Lea in a ladder match. It was an exciting match that was far better than any WWE women's match I've seen involving Torrie Wilson, Maria Kanelis, Ashley Massaro, or Candice

Michelle. It's time for WWE to bring its talented ladies from Louisville to the main roster. ¶Injuries are a part of the game, but Victoria has no right to send her opponents to the disabled list without repercussions. She should be fined and suspended.

ORLANDO, FL: Abyss certainly isn't your traditional NWA World champion. He doesn't exactly call to mind grappling greats such as Lou Thesz, "Whipper" Billy Watson, and Harley Race, but Abyss has done something very few people have been able to do in beating Sting for the World championship. I had Abyss' victory pegged as a fluke, yet his performance at Turning Point has me re-thinking that first knee-jerk assessment. Abyss managed to retain the title in a three-way match against Sting and Christian Cage, which is pretty darn impressive. ¶That being said, I'll literally eat this column if "The Man-Monster" is still wearing that belt by the time you read these words. The competition in TNA is fiercer than it has ever been. Sting, Cage, Kurt Angle, and Samoa Joe are all legitimate title contenders. Rhino, Ron Killings, A.J. Styles, and Raven have all held that title as well, and each one of them could beat Abyss on any given day. ¶But, for now, I'll give the devil his due, and the devil, in this case, is the former Sinister Minister, Jim Mitchell. Mitchell may be the greatest manager in the sport today. He has kept Abyss on the fringe of title contention for two years, and has kept him from growing stale or losing his focus. Now the big man is the World champion, and Mitchell's evil laugh can be heard throughout the Impact Zone.

STAMFORD, CT: B.G. James and Kip James, previously known as The New Age Outlaws and The



THE VOODOO KIN MAFIA

James Gang and currently known as The Voodoo Kin Mafia, have issued a "million-dollar challenge" to Shawn Michaels and Triple-H, the current incarnation of DeGeneration X. ¶Wrestlers have been making challenges like this for as long as I can remember. Of course, Michaels and Triple-H will never acknowledge the challenge, because that will only bring the VKM the attention they so desperately crave. And if Michaels and Triple-H *did* answer the challenge, it would pit two Hall of Famers in the prime of their careers against two perennial mid-card talents on the downside of their careers. Michaels and Triple-H would humiliate the for-

mer Road Dogg and Billy Gunn worse than they have humiliated The Spirit Squad. ¶I called WWE headquarters to see if I could get an official comment on this so-called challenge. I connected with a secretary who sounded like it was her first day on the job. "The New Age Outlaws are still wrestling?" she asked. I couldn't tell whether she was being serious or not. "Do you really think those guys are in a position to be throwing around a million dollars, Mr. Brock?" ¶No, I don't. And I don't think it really matters. DX has more important matters to worry about than a team that struggles to beat The Naturals. □

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photos

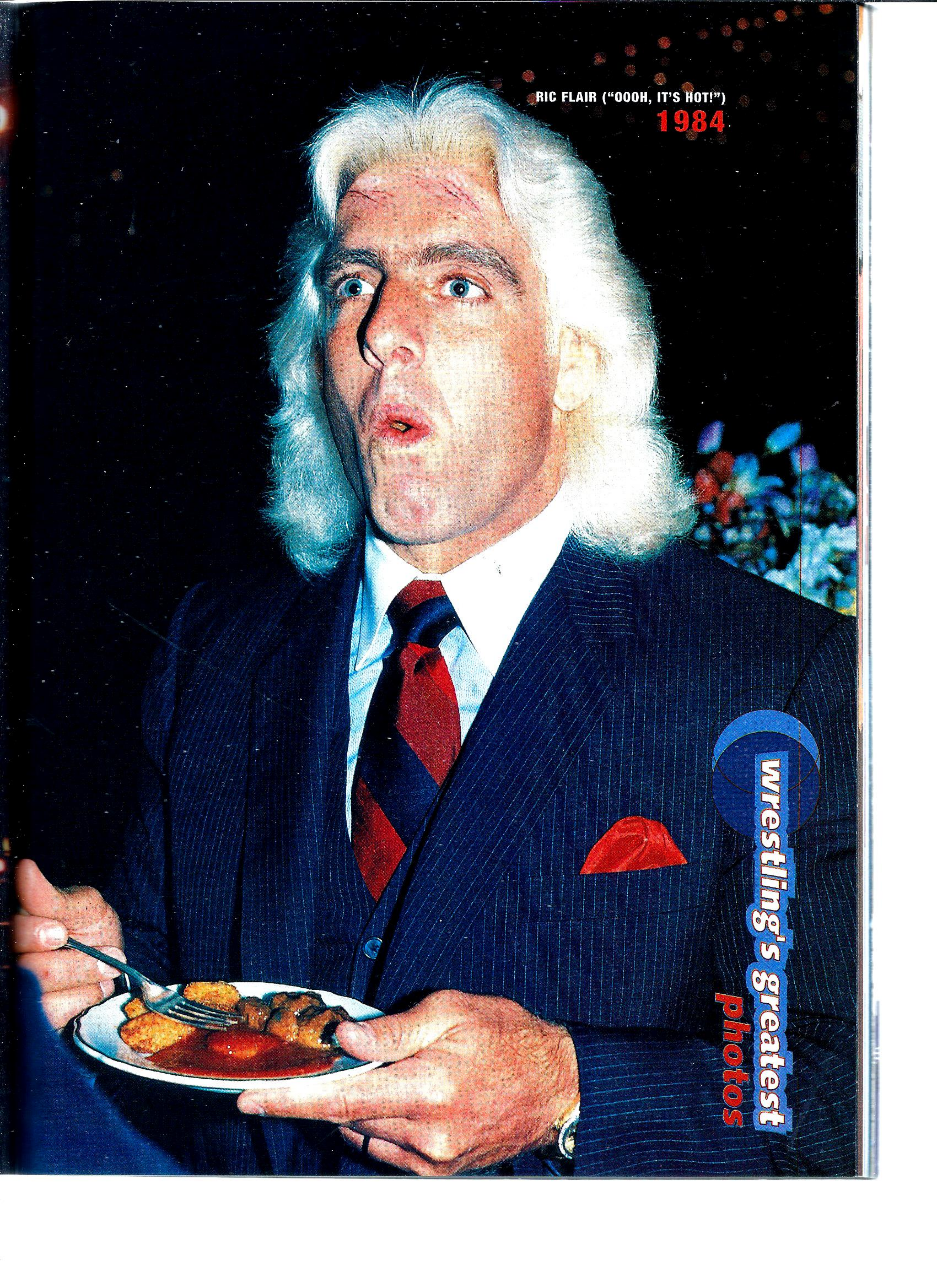
VAMPIRO vs. STING
2000



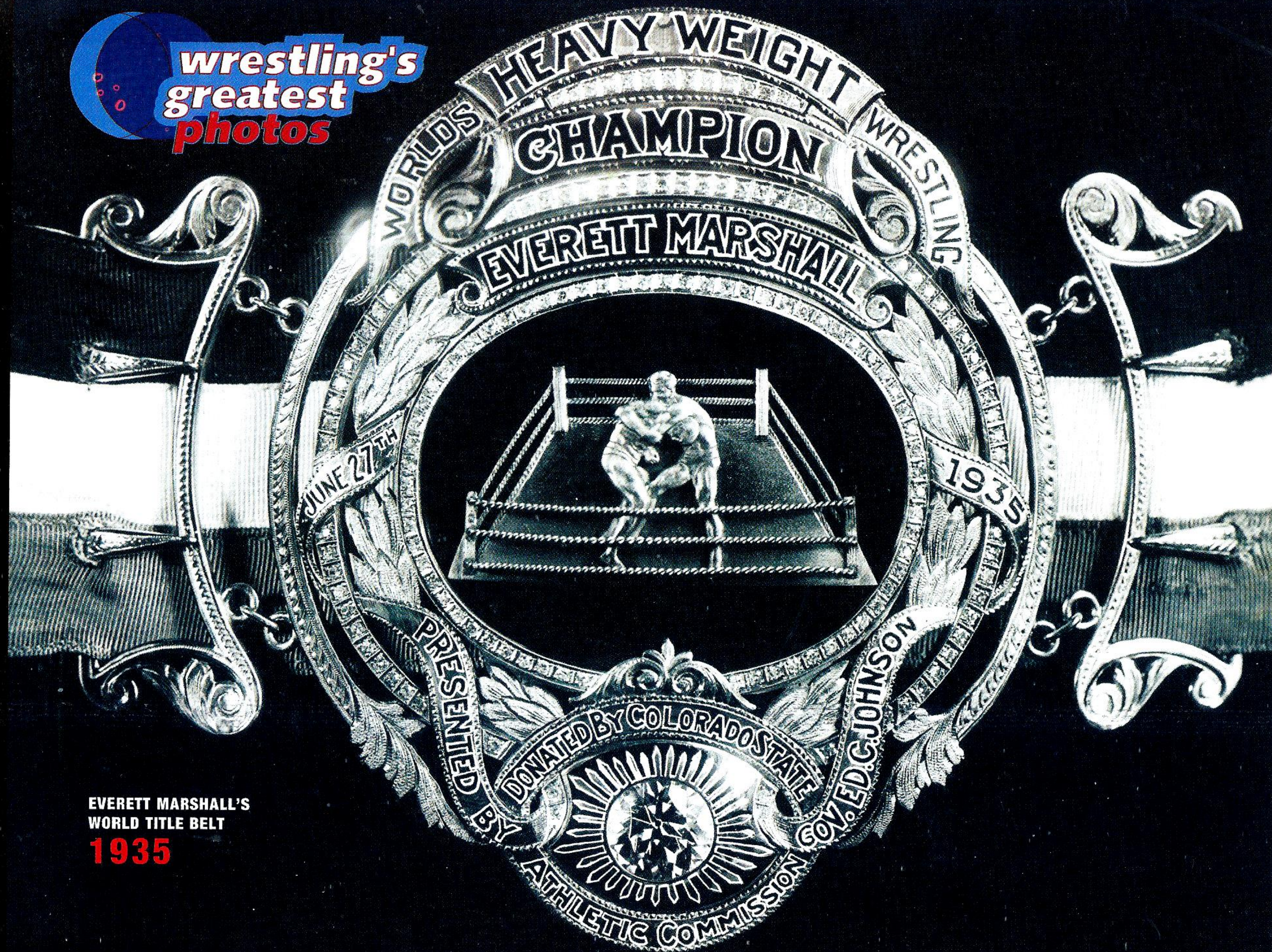
RIC FLAIR ("OOOH, IT'S HOT!")

1984

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greatest
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EVERETT MARSHALL'S
WORLD TITLE BELT

1935

UNDERTAKER vs. MR. KENNEDY
2006

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photos



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photos

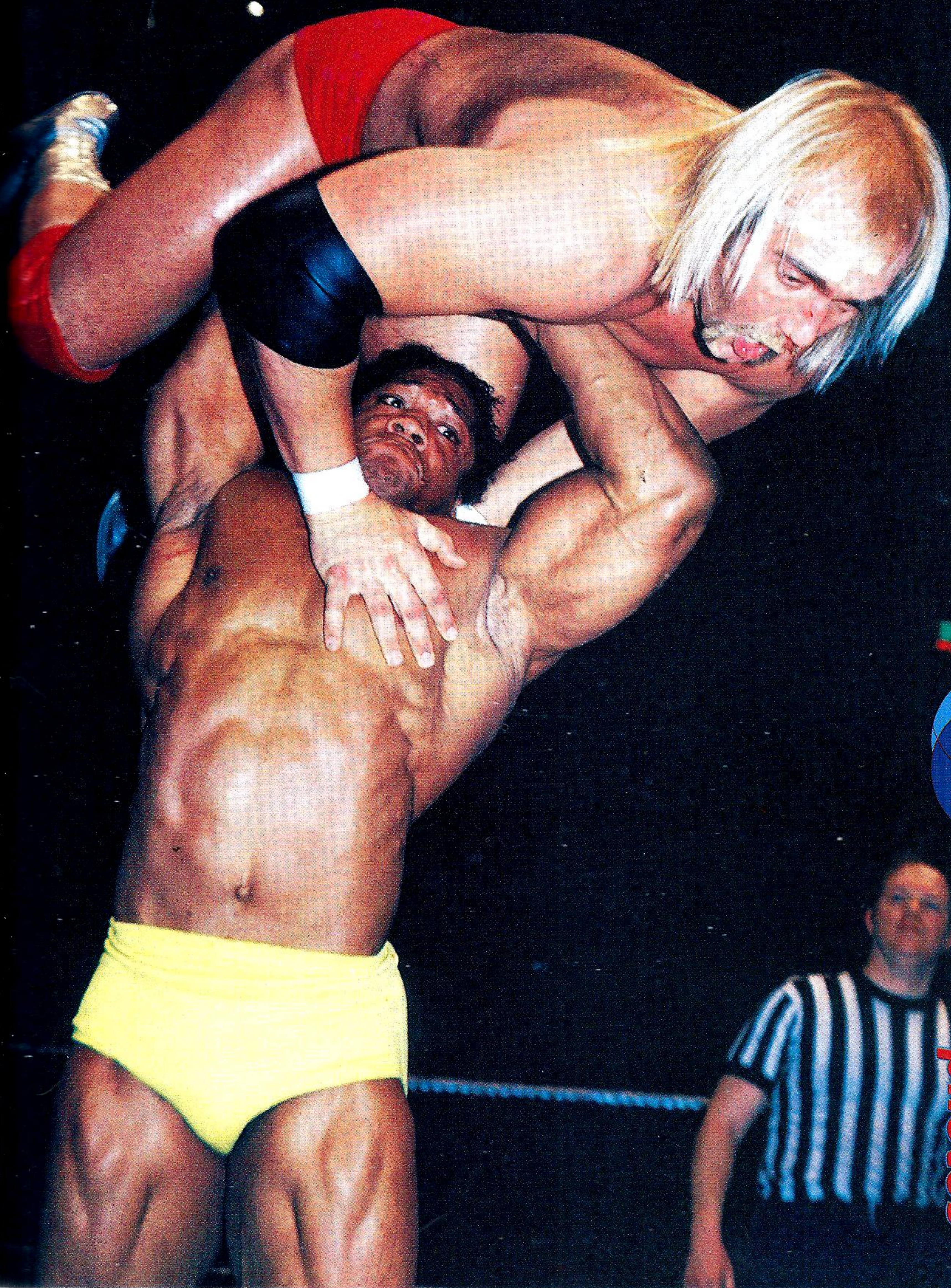
THE SPOILER & JAMES J. DILLON

1981



TONY ATLAS vs. HULK HOGAN

1981



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ERIC EMBRY
1992

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photos



RICK MORTON vs. STAN LANE

1987

wrestling's Greatest
photos



WRESTLEMANIA

Time Capsules

Examining WWE's Biggest Event Through The Years

WHEN VINCE McMAHON launched WrestleMania in 1985, very few longtime observers of pro wrestling thought it would be a success. Many of those same people abhorred the idea of WrestleMania being about anything other than wrestling. Yet McMahon had a broader vision for 'Mania, which gave birth to what came to be known as "sports entertainment."

Most of the editors of our family of wrestling magazines were anti-WrestleMania. They didn't think it would work. And, if it did, it would change wrestling for the worse.

"I thought Mr. T was an actor. I was quite certain Cyndi Lauper was a singer. What business do they have in a wrestling ring?" Those were the comments of Assistant Editor Eddie Ellner in the June 1985 issue of *INSIDE WRESTLING*.

However, by the end of WrestleMania III, still regarded by many as the best 'Mania of all-time, even the hard-bitten wrestling purists at London Publishing had to concede that WrestleMania was good for business ... and good for wrestling.

"A few months ago, I predicted that 'The Silverdome would be less than half-filled for this bout.' Well, to say I was wrong is a bit of an understatement. I was VERRRRRY WROOONG, and I happily admit it

... Does anyone know what color wine goes well with crow?" Those were the comments of Editor-in-Chief Peter King in the July 1987 issue of *INSIDE WRESTLING*.

Once our staff was on board with the concept of WrestleMania, editorial opinion became more balanced. Over the years, our editors and readers have hailed the excellence of Razor Ramon vs. Shawn Michaels at WrestleMania X, Bret Hart vs. Steve Austin at WrestleMania XIII, The Rock vs. Hulk Hogan at WrestleMania X8, and Chris Benoit vs. Triple-H vs. Shawn Michaels at WrestleMania XX.

Nevertheless, we have still criticized WrestleMania when it was warranted. Allowing Hulk Hogan to crash WrestleMania IX and beat Yokozuna for the WWF World title, only minutes after Yoko had defeated Bret Hart for the belt, was a tad too much. Having a McMahon in each corner for the four-way main event at WrestleMania XVI went too far. John Cena wearing a gangster outfit and Triple-H wearing a gladiator costume at WrestleMania 22 was overkill.

In the following pages, you'll read opinions that came straight from the gut, from editors and fans who were experiencing WrestleMania at different points in time. We missed the mark every now and then, but got it right for the most part.

The same can be said of WrestleMania.

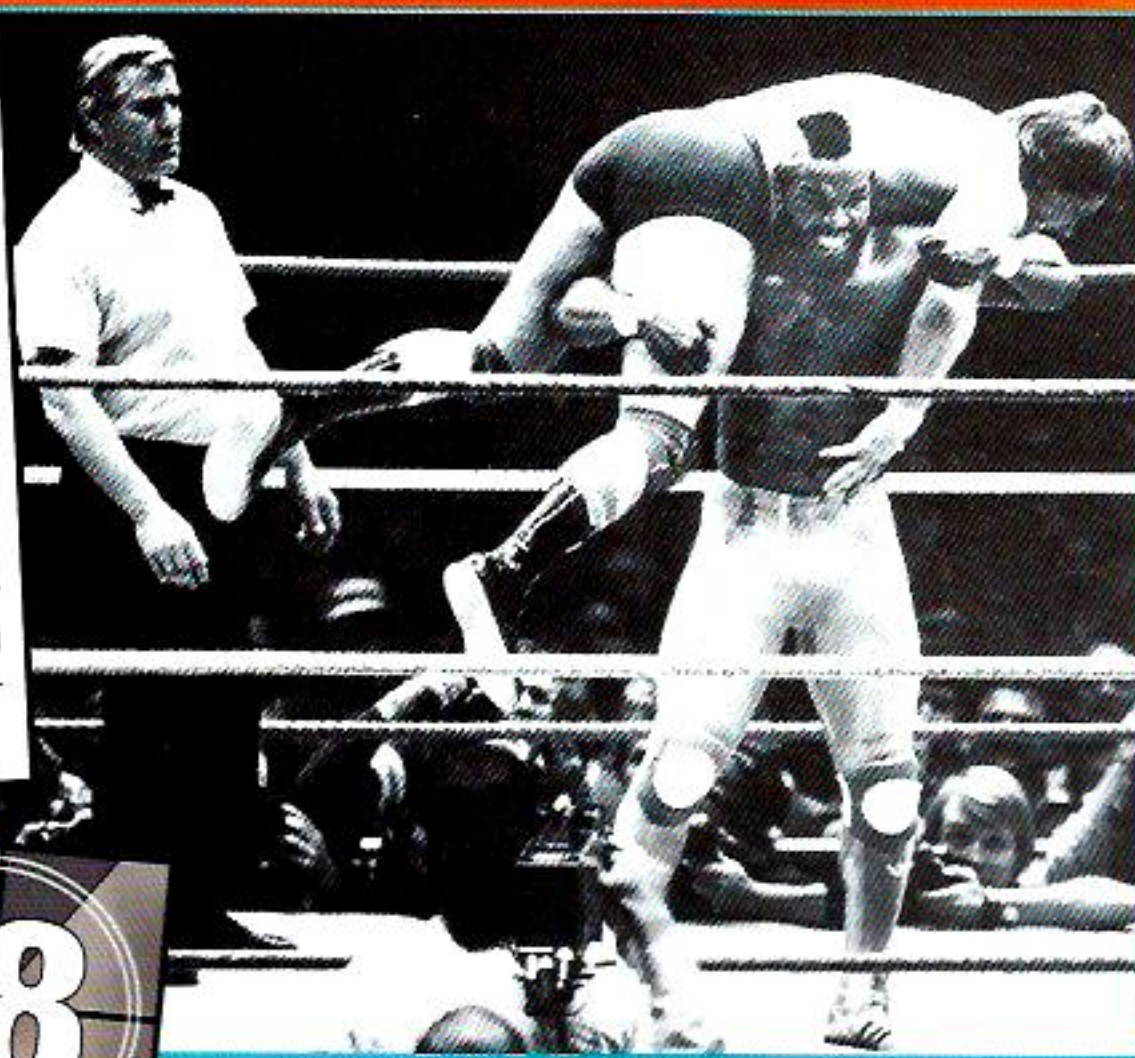
WRESTLEMANIA I

Madison Square Garden, New York, NY

[03-31-85]

RESULTS:

Tito Santana defeated The Executioner ... David Sammartino and Brutus Beefcake wrestled to a double-disqualification ... Rick Steamboat defeated Matt Borne ... King Kong Bundy beat S.D. Jones ... Andre the Giant beat Big John Studd ... Junkyard Dog beat Greg Valentine by countout ... Nikolai Volkoff & The Iron Sheik beat WWF tag team champions Barry Windham & Mike Rotundo for the title ... Wendi Richter beat World women's champion Lelani Kai for the title ... Hulk Hogan & Mr. T defeated Roddy Piper & Paul Orndorff.



WrestleMania RANKING:

18

Our Comment:

Who are those people standing next to Hulk Hogan and Roddy Piper? I thought Mr. T was an actor. I was quite certain Cyndi Lauper was a singer. What business do they have in a wrestling ring? Why are they suddenly standing alongside the wrestlers? I don't like it. I think it smells and is unprofessional. I come to the arena to watch professional athletes in contests of skill and courage. If I wanted to watch Mr. T, then I'd wake up early Saturday morning and watch the cartoons. My advice to the promoters is to leave wrestling to the wrestlers. It's been doing fine all these years on its own merits and can only be damaged by its association with Hollywood.

—Eddie Ellner, "The Insider," *INSIDE WRESTLING*, June 1985

Your Comment:

I have for years relied on the WWF to provide me with wrestling excitement. Rarely have they let me down, the recent *WrestleMania* being no exception ... However, the shower of publicity that *WrestleMania* attracted was annoying. In listening to the bloated importance of the WWF announcers as they described *WrestleMania*, one got the impression that the Pope must be on the card, in addition to Liberace. The Rock 'n' Wrestling Connection has run its course. It served its purpose of bringing wrestling the national attention it deserves, but now it's time for rock 'n' roll to go back to the record stores and concert halls. Leave wrestling to the wrestlers.

—Rochelle Weitzen, "Between Falls," *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, September 1985

WRESTLEMANIA II

[04-07-86]

Nassau Coliseum, Uniondale, NY

Rosemont Horizon, Rosemont, IL

Los Angeles Sports Arena, Los Angeles, CA

RESULTS:

Paul Orndorff and Don Muraco wrestled to a double-countout in 4:10 ... Randy Savage pinned George Steele in 5:10 ... Jake Roberts pinned George Welles in 3:15 ... Mr. T beat Roddy Piper by disqualification at 1:15 of round four in their boxing match ... Fabulous Moolah defeated Velvet McIntyre in 1:25 to retain the women's title ... Cpl. Kirschner pinned Nikolai Volkoff in 2:05 after using Fred Blassie's cane ... Andre the Giant won a battle royal, last eliminating Bret Hart; the bout also included Jim Neidhart, John Studd, Hillbilly Jim, Bruno Sammartino, Tonga Kid, Jim Brunzell, Pedro Morales, Tony Atlas, Ted Arcidi, Dan Spivey, Brian Blair, The Iron Sheik, and football players William Perry, Bill Fralic, Russ Francis, Jim Covert, Harvey Martin, and Emie Holmes ... The British Bulldogs won the World tag team title from Greg Valentine & Brutus Beefcake in 13:03 ... Rick Steamboat pinned Hercules Hernandez ... Adrian Adonis pinned Uncle Elmer ... Dory Funk Jr. & Terry Funk defeated Junkyard Dog & Tito Santana in 13:00 when Terry pinned Junkyard Dog after hitting him with Jimmy Hart's megaphone ... Hulk Hogan retained his World title by defeating King Kong Bundy in a cage match.



WrestleMania RANKING:

8

Our Comment:

If WrestleMania II didn't go as well as McMahon had planned, he has only himself to blame. In 1985, everything he touched turned to gold. He got carried away with himself. He said he could make wrestling bigger than the NFL. And he believed it. He's a genius, but sometimes he's also a mad genius. He brought in a lot of money at WrestleMania I, but he spent a lot of money, too. This year, with the WrestleMania concept instilled in the heads of the wrestling public, he could have streamlined the event so that he could still offer a "Super Bowl" type package but without the wasteful frills. Perhaps the third time around, he will learn.

—Stu Saks, "Behind The Dressing Room Door," *INSIDE WRESTLING*, August 1986

Your Comment:

I thought last year's WrestleMania was great, but the WWF really outdid itself with WrestleMania II. It was definitely the biggest event in wrestling history. All the bouts were excellent, but the cage match between Hulk Hogan and King Kong Bundy stole the show ... Hogan took everything Bundy could dish out and hammered right back at him ... Hulk's spectacular victory over Bundy was his greatest match since he won the World title. It's just more proof that Hogan can't be stopped by anybody, and the WWF belt is around his waist for good!

—Mike Facciani, "Sincerely Yours," *INSIDE WRESTLING*, August 1986

WRESTLEMANIA III

[03-29-87]

Silverdome, Pontiac, MI

RESULTS:

Rick Martel & Tom Zenk defeated Bob Orton & Don Muraco in 5:37 ... Billy Jack Haynes and Hercules Hernandez battled to a double-countout in 7:44 ... Hillbilly Jim, Haiti Kid, & Little Beaver defeated King Kong Bundy, Lord Littlebrook, & Little Tokyo by disqualification in 3:25 ... Harley Race pinned Junkyard Dog in 4:22 ... Greg Valentine & Brutus Beefcake defeated Jacques & Raymond Rougeau in 4:03 ... Roddy Piper, in his retirement match, defeated Adrian Adonis in 6:20; after the match, Brutus Beefcake cut off Adonis' hair ... Bret Hart, Jim Neidhart, & Danny Davis beat Dynamite Kid, Davey Boy Smith, & Tito Santana in 8:52 ... Butch Reed pinned Koko B. Ware in 3:30 ... Rick Steamboat captured the Intercontinental title by defeating Randy Savage in 14:35 ... The Honky Tonk Man pinned Jake Roberts in 7:04 ... The Iron Sheik & Nikolai Volkoff defeated Brian Blair & Jim Brunzell by disqualification in 5:44 ... World champion Hulk Hogan pinned Andre the Giant at the 12:01 mark.



WrestleMania RANKING:



Our Comment:

WrestleMania III is history. The show was terrific, the Silverdome was sold out, and the event itself was perhaps the best-promoted sporting event ever.

I want to give my congratulations to WWF head Vince McMahon. But first, I guess I should give him my apologies. A few months ago, in this very column, I predicted that "The Silverdome would be less than half-filled for this bout." Well, to say I was wrong is a bit of an understatement. I was VERRRRRRY WROOONG, and I happily admit it ... Does anyone know what color wine goes well with crow?

—Peter King, "Editor's Notebook," *INSIDE WRESTLING*, July 1987

Your Comment:

I have just witnessed WrestleMania III on the big screen at the Mid-Hudson Civic Center in Poughkeepsie, New York, and have never been more satisfied. While the Hogan-Andre bout was not the best on the card, it was a thriller. My personal favorites were the Piper-Adonis bout and the six-man contest featuring The Hart Foundation and Danny Davis vs. The British Bulldogs and Tito Santana ... And what about Steamboat winning the Intercontinental title? To Peter King: No more predictions, please. In the May 1987 issue of *INSIDE WRESTLING*, he said the Silverdome would be less than half full. He was wrong. In fact, an indoor attendance record was set. And by the way, Mr. King, all I saw on this day was good, hard wrestling.

—Jim Baker, "Sincerely Yours," *INSIDE WRESTLING*, August 1987

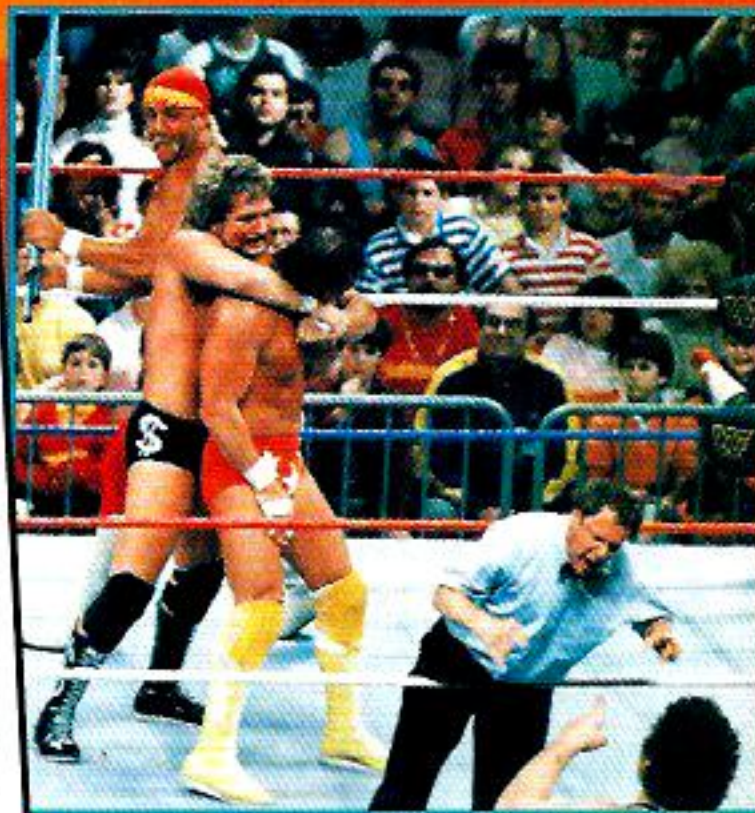
WRESTLEMANIA IV

Trump Plaza, Atlantic City, NJ

[03-27-88]

RESULTS:

World title tournament, round one: Ted DiBiase pinned Hacksaw Duggan in 4:54 following a fistdrop ... Don Muraco beat Dino Bravo by disqualification in 4:53 ... Greg Valentine pinned Rick Steamboat in 9:12 ... Randy Savage pinned Butch Reed in 5:07 ... One Man Gang beat Bam Bam Bigelow via countout in 2:56 ... Rick Rude and Jake Roberts battled to a draw ... Quarterfinals: Andre the Giant and Hulk Hogan battled to a double-disqualification in 5:22 ... DiBiase pinned Muraco in 5:44 ... Savage pinned Valentine in 6:06 ... Semifinals: Savage beat Gang by disqualification in 4:05 ... Finals: Savage pinned DiBiase in 9:27 to capture the World title ... Non-tournament bouts: Bad News Brown won a battle royal, last eliminating Bret Hart at 10:40; the other participants were: Sika, Jim Neidhart, Brian Blair, Raymond Rougeau, Jim Brunzell, Ron Bass, Hillbilly Jim, Danny Davis, Jimmy Powers, Nikolai Volkoff, Boris Zuhov, Ken Patera, Jacques Rougeau, Harley Race, Paul Roma, & Junkyard Dog ... The Ultimate Warrior pinned Hercules Hernandez in 4:29 ... Brutus Beefcake defeated Intercontinental champ The Honky Tonk Man by disqualification in 6:30 ... The Islanders & Bobby Heenan defeated The British Bulldogs & Koko B. Ware when Heenan pinned Ware at the 7:30 mark ... Demolition captured the World tag team title from Rick Martel & Tito Santana when Ax pinned Martel at 12:53.



WrestleMania RANKING:

7

Our Comment:

Thrust into the tournament, Randy Savage did not let fortune pass him by. He met the challenge with the skill and determination of a born champion. Millions of people witnessed the peak of a great champion on March 27. The most any athlete can ask is to realize his potential. For years, Savage was pegged for stardom; now he has the belt to prove it. Let the trumpets play: The Hulk Hogan era has officially ended!

—Eddie Ellner, "The Insider,"
INSIDE WRESTLING, July 1988

Your Comment:

There is a fine line between healthy and unhealthy competition. Within the past year, the fierce competition between the NWA and the WWF has gotten out of hand. On Thanksgiving, in presenting the Survivor Series, the WWF tried to cut the drawing power of the NWA's Starrcade '87. The WWF used the same tactic in presenting the Royal Rumble on the USA cable network during the finals of the NWA's Bunkhouse Stampede. Most recently, the NWA retaliated by airing the *Clash Of The Champions* on WTBS while WrestleMania IV was only available on pay-per-view ... By trying to hurt each other, Crockett and McMahon are hurting the sport, rather than helping it. They also show brazen disregard for the one thing that keeps them in business: the fans.

—Harry Burkett, "Feedback," *Wrestling 88*, Fall 1988

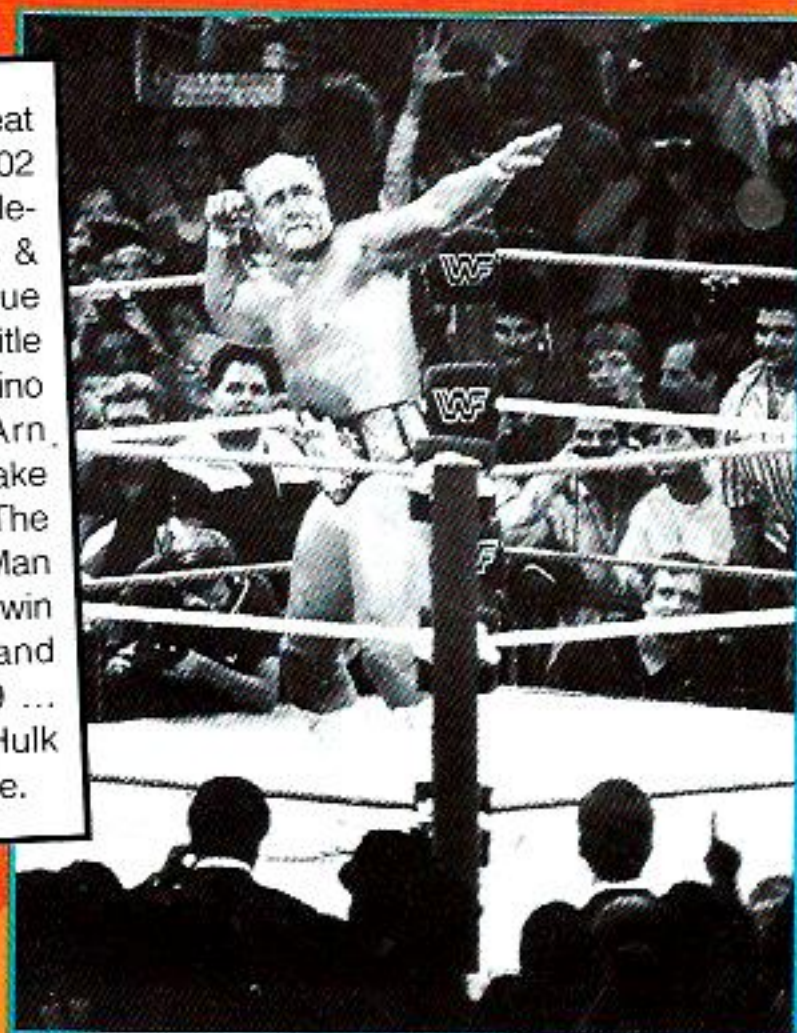
WRESTLEMANIA V

[04-02-89]

Trump Plaza, Atlantic City, NJ

RESULTS:

Hercules defeated King Haku in 6:37 ... The Twin Towers beat The Rockers when Akeem pinned Shawn Michaels at the 8:02 mark ... Ted DiBiase and Brutus Beefcake battled to a double-countout in 10:01 ... The Bushwhackers defeated Jacques & Raymond Rougeau in 5:10 ... Curt Hennig pinned The Blue Blazer in 5:38 ... Demolition retained their World tag team title with a victory over Warlord, Barbarian, & Mr. Fuji in 8:26 ... Dino Bravo beat Ron Garvin in 3:48 ... Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson defeated Rick Martel & Tito Santana in 9:17 ... Jake Roberts beat Andre the Giant by disqualification in 9:44 ... The Hart Foundation defeated Greg Valentine & The Honky Tonk Man in 7:40 ... Rick Rude pinned The Ultimate Warrior in 9:36 to win the Intercontinental championship ... Bad News Brown and Hacksaw Duggan battled to a double-disqualification in 3:49 ... Terry Taylor defeated Bobby Heenan in 32 seconds ... Hulk Hogan pinned Randy Savage in 17:54 to capture the World title.



WrestleMania RANKING:

19

Our Comment:

Hogan somehow overcame a brilliant performance by Savage to regain the WWF World title at WrestleMania V on April 2 in Atlantic City. Hogan became only the second man in WWF history to regain the World title; the other is Bruno Sammartino. Hogan may be an egotistical lout, and his performance in the soon-to-be-released *No Holds Barred* will show him to be the worst actor in history, but there's no doubt about this: Hulk Hogan must—absolutely *must*—be remembered as one of the greatest wrestlers ever.

—David Rosenbaum, "No Holds Barred," *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, August 1989

Your Comment:

I truly enjoyed your "Preview And Analysis" of the Hulk Hogan-Randy Savage WrestleMania V main event in your June 1988 issue. It sure looks like your forecast was correct about the future of this feud, too. In fact, it looks like the *real* war is about to begin! Who would have guessed that Savage would fire Elizabeth and hire Sherri Martel as his new manager? ... One thing that I didn't agree with, however, was your opinion in "Forecast For The Future" claiming that Savage would never compete with Hogan for fans. I'm no supporter of the "Macho Man," but even I have to admit that he has his following. The conflict between "Hulkamania" and "Macho Madness" is going to make this summer one to remember.

—Arnie Cash, "Between Falls," *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, August 1989

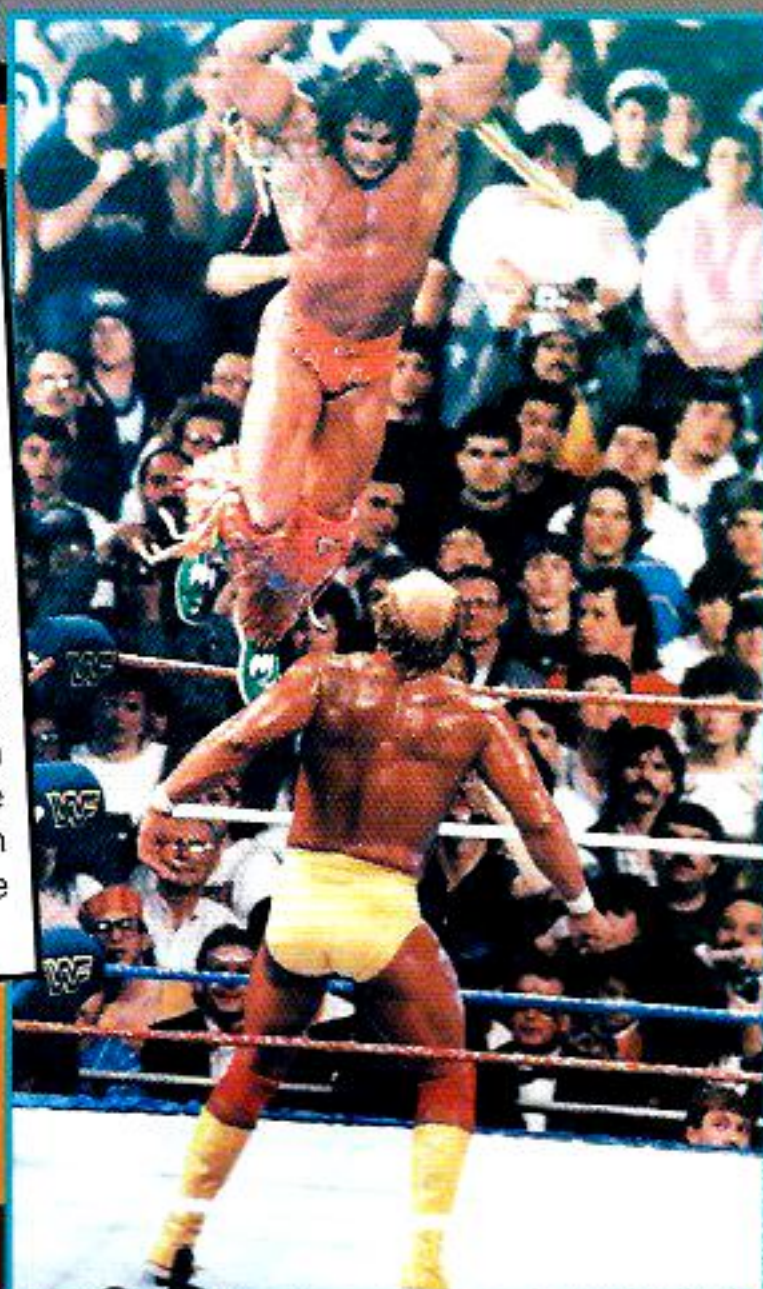
WRESTLEMANIA VI

(04-01-90)

SkyDome, Toronto, Ontario

RESULTS:

Dark match: Paul Roma pinned Steve Lombardi ... Pay-per-view bouts: Demolition regained the World tag team title from Andre the Giant & Haku when Ax pinned Haku at 9:15 ... Rick Martel beat Koko B. Ware in 5:31 ... Earthquake pinned Hercules in 4:52 ... Brutus Beefcake pinned Curt Hennig in 7:48 when Hennig was knocked out by Lanny Poffo's clipboard ... Roddy Piper and Bad News Brown were both counted out of the ring at 6:48 ... The Hart Foundation defeated The Bolsheviks in 19 seconds when Bret Hart pinned Boris Zukhov ... The Barbarian pinned Tito Santana in 4:33 ... In the WWF's first-ever mixed tag team match, Dusty Rhodes & Sapphire defeated Randy Savage & Sensational Sherri in 7:52 ... The Orient Express beat The Rockers by countout ... Hacksaw Duggan pinned Dino Bravo in 4:15 ... Ted DiBiase regained his "Million-Dollar Belt" when Jake Roberts was counted out at 11:56 ... Big Bossman beat Akeem in 1:49 ... Rick Rude pinned Jimmy Snuka in 3:51 ... The Ultimate Warrior pinned Hulk Hogan in 22:51 to capture the World title.



WrestleMania RANKING:

17

Our Comment:

Jack Tunney certainly didn't make any friends with his post-WrestleMania VI announcement that there would be no Hulk Hogan-Ultimate Warrior rematch. Could you imagine the president of the world's largest wrestling organization publicly stating that he wouldn't allow these men to wrestle again because they had "battled past the point of exhaustion" and "beyond the threshold of pain" in their first encounter? Heaven forbid. This is professional wrestling. We wouldn't want anybody to get tired or hurt.

—Stu Saks, "Editor's Notebook,"
INSIDE WRESTLING, August 1990

Your Comment:

The Ultimate Warrior and Hulk Hogan gave the most memorable bout of my life at WrestleMania VI. When the final count was slapped to the mat, I flew into celebration. Finally, "Hulkamania" is dead. Then, as I watched a dejected Hogan clutch the championship belt for the last time before he gave it to Warrior, I felt a lump in my throat. As the two embraced and saluted each other, and as Hogan slowly drifted into the crowd away from the ring, I felt a rush. This was the last gasp of "Hulkamania," and it engulfed me. Hulk Hogan will forever hold a place in my heart. Hogan was a champion for the ages, and only a true champion could face such a devastating loss with such class, dignity, and respect. No posing. No sharing Warrior's glory. Hogan saluted his conqueror and let the world share in the new champion's moment.

—Sean E. Reavie, "Between Falls," *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, August 1990

WRESTLEMANIA VII

Los Angeles Sports Arena, Los Angeles, CA

[03-24-91]

RESULTS:

Dark match: Koko B. Ware pinned Steve Lombardi ... Pay-per-view bouts: The Rockers defeated The Barbarian & Haku in 10:41 ... Kerry Von Erich pinned Dino Bravo in 3:11 ... Davey Boy Smith pinned The Warlord at the 8:15 mark ... The Nasty Boys captured the World tag team title by defeating The Hart Foundation in 12:10 when Brian Knobs pinned Bret Hart ... Jake Roberts pinned Rick Martel in 8:34 of a blindfold match ... The Undertaker pinned Jimmy Snuka in 4:20 ... The Ultimate Warrior pinned Randy Savage in 20:48 of a retirement match ... Koji Kitao & Genichiro Tenryu defeated Demolition when Tenryu pinned Smash in 4:44 ... Big Bossman defeated Intercontinental champion Curt Hennig by disqualification in 10:47 when Haku and The Barbarian interfered ... Earthquake pinned Greg Valentine in 3:14 ... The Legion of Doom defeated Power & Glory in 59 seconds ... Virgil defeated Ted DiBiase by countout in 7:41 ... Jacques Rougeau pinned Tito Santana in 1:21 ... Hulk Hogan pinned Sgt. Slaughter in 20:26 to capture his third World title.



WrestleMania RANKING:

12

Our Comment:

One of the matches covered in this "Supercards" issue—indeed an early candidate for 1991's Match of the Year—is the bout between The Ultimate Warrior and Randy Savage at WrestleMania VII. You remember it, don't you? The one with the stipulation that the loser must retire. Savage lost, but he's still wrestling. To my way of thinking, that makes a mockery of the WrestleMania VII match stipulation, and makes me wonder about any similar stipulations the WWF might impose in the future ... Once again, WWF President Jack Tunney sits on the sidelines, conspicuous by his silence. He should do something about the situation. But his only action is inaction.

—Craig Peters, "In Focus," *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, August 1991

Your Comment:

The most sickening match at WrestleMania VII had to be Randy Savage vs. The Ultimate Warrior because after Warrior beat Savage, he paraded around the ring and then stepped on the fallen "Macho King." You would think Warrior would have enough respect for his opponent to at least help Savage up, or even shake his hand. Warrior, I've lost all respect for you because of what you did. I hope this letter really sinks in to your big head and makes you realize what you did.

—Brian Arnold, "Sincerely Yours," *INSIDE WRESTLING*, August 1991

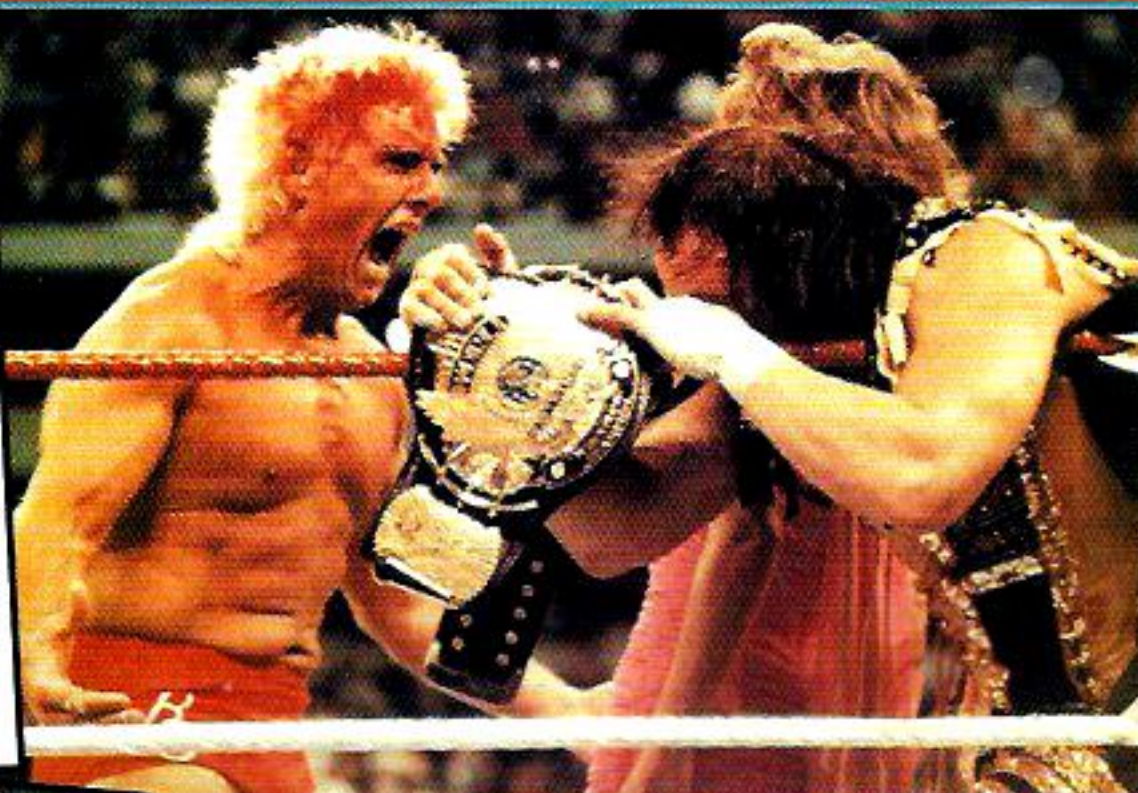
WRESTLEMANIA VIII

Hoosier Dome, Indianapolis, IN

(04-05-92)

RESULTS:

Dark match: The Bushwhackers beat The Beverly Brothers ... Pay-per-view bouts: Shawn Michaels pinned Tito Santana in 10:39 ... Tatanka pinned Rick Martel in 4:32 ... The Natural Disasters beat World tag team champions Ted DiBiase & Irwin R. Schyster by countout in 8:39 when DiBiase & Schyster walked out of the ring ... Virgil, The Big Bossman, Hacksaw Duggan, & Sgt. Slaughter defeated Repo Man, The Mountie, & The Nasty Boys in 5:22 ... Randy Savage pinned World champion Ric Flair in 18:05 to win the title ... The Undertaker pinned Jake Roberts in 6:41 ... Bret Hart pinned Intercontinental champion Roddy Piper in 13:56 to win the title ... Owen Hart pinned Skinner in 1:11 ... Hulk Hogan defeated Sid Justice by disqualification in 12:44 when manager Harvey Wippleman interfered.



**WrestleMania
RANKING:**

16

Our Comment:

Jake Roberts had a good thing going with The Undertaker. They were the most feared duo in the federation, especially after they ruined the wedding reception for Randy Savage and Elizabeth after SummerSlam last year. Earlier this year, Undertaker had a change of heart and prevented Roberts from blindsiding Savage and his wife with a chair. If Roberts had been smart, he would have just walked away from his partnership with the dangerous Undertaker and plotted a new strategy for spreading mayhem. Instead, he got angry with his partner, promising to take him to "my hell" at WrestleMania. On April 5, though, Undertaker took "The Snake" to *his* hell. With the massive Hoosier Dome crowd behind him, Undertaker blasted Roberts with a tombstone piledriver on the arena floor, then pinned him in the middle of the ring.

—Andy Rodriguez, "Win, Lose, Or Draw," *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, August 1992

Your Comment:

The magic is definitely still alive in the WWF! The amazing WrestleMania card was both exhausting and exciting. All nine televised matches saw action that only the WWF knows how to present. I think the World title match between Ric Flair and Randy Savage was the greatest match ever! ... WCW, pack your bags. There is no way that WCW can ever be half as popular as the WWF. Remember this the next time one of you decides to write a biased article singing the praises of WCW. Enough is enough. WrestleMania was sufficient to re-establish the reputation of the WWF. The card was a dream come true—at least for this Danish wrestling fan.

—Soren Vestergaard, "Your Letters," *The Wrestler*, August 1992

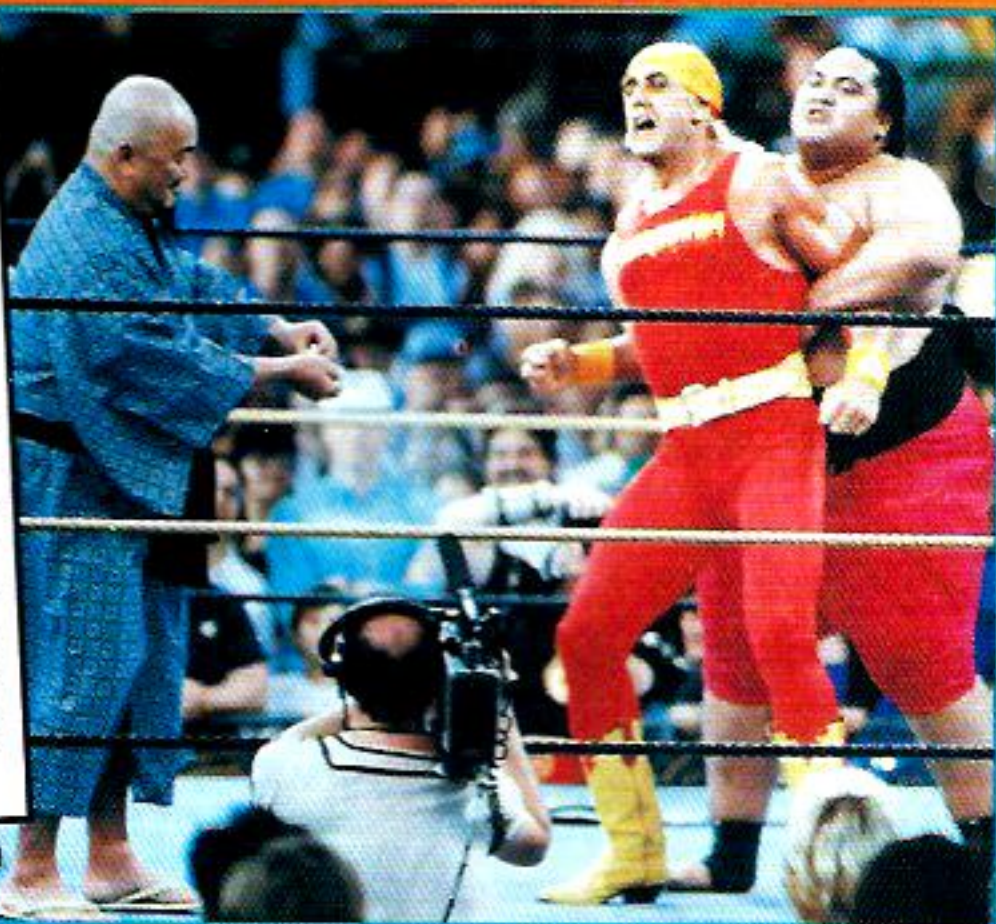
WRESTLEMANIA IX

Caesars Palace, Las Vegas, NV

[04-04-93]

RESULTS:

Dark match: Tito Santana pinned Papa Shango ... Pay-per-view bouts: Tatanka defeated Intercontinental champ Shawn Michaels by disqualification ... Rick & Scott Steiner defeated The Headshrinkers when Scott pinned Samu ... Doink pinned Crush as a Doink clone assisted him while the referee was unconscious ... Razor Ramon pinned Bob Backlund ... World tag team champions Money Inc. defeated Brutus Beefcake & Hulk Hogan by disqualification ... Lex Luger pinned Curt Hennig while Hennig's feet were on the ropes ... The Undertaker defeated Giant Gonzales by disqualification ... Yokozuna pinned World champion Bret Hart to capture the title after Mr. Fuji threw salt in Hart's eyes. After the match, Fuji and Yokozuna issued a challenge to Hulk Hogan, who accepted, pinned Yokozuna, and was awarded the belt.



WrestleMania RANKING:

4

Our Comment:

Mr. Fuji proved it conclusively at WrestleMania IX: He is the worst manager in the sport today. His man Yokozuna had just defeated Bret Hart to capture the WWF World championship, doing so only after Fuji tossed salt in Bret's face. Finally, he had his first World champion after a decade of managing in the WWF. Then he did something amazingly stupid. After Hulk Hogan came to ring-side to offer Hart assistance, Fuji challenged the "Hulkster" to a title match right there. Hogan needed less than 30 seconds to pin Yokozuna, who clearly was exhausted and in no shape to wrestle. Of course, it didn't help that Fuji had accidentally thrown salt in his own wrestler's face. Instant karma got him. In the days following the incredible event, Fuji protested, claiming the title change should be invalidated because there was officially no match contract. WWF President Jack Tunney ruled that Fuji's challenge comprised a binding verbal contract. The result would stand. Hogan was champion. Fuji was a champion, too. A champion fool.

—Andy Rodriguez, "Win, Lose, Or Draw," *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, August 1993

Your Comment:

Well, Hulk Hogan has returned to the WWF, seen his shadow, and now there will be nine more years of "Hulkamania." Yes, WrestleMania IX has come and gone, leaving its mark on wrestling history and a thorn in everyone's side. You would think Hogan would've gotten the message that he was no longer needed, but he's come back to haunt us with the WWF title in hand again. I just want to say that I hope the shortest title match in history leads to a shorter title reign.

—David S. Mackey, "Between Falls," *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, August 1993

WRESTLEMANIA X

(03-20-94)

Madison Square Garden, New York, NY

RESULTS:

Dark match: The Heavenly Bodies defeated The Bushwhackers ... Pay-per-view bouts: Owen Hart pinned Bret Hart at 20:21 ... Bam Bam Bigelow & Luna Vachon beat Doink & Dink when Bigelow pinned Doink at 6:09 ... In a falls-count-anywhere match, Randy Savage defeated Crush, two falls to one, at 9:42 when Savage tied up Crush in a room under the Garden tunnel and Crush couldn't return to the ring in 60 seconds ... Women's champ Alundra Blayze pinned Lelani Kai at 3:24 ... Men on a Mission defeated World tag team champions The Quebecers by countout at 7:43 ... World champ Yokozuna beat Lex Luger by disqualification at 14:40 when Luger hit guest referee Curt Hennig ... Earthquake pinned Adam Bomb in 32 seconds ... In a ladder match, Intercontinental champion Razor Ramon defeated Shawn Michaels at 18:45 ... Bret Hart pinned World champion Yokozuna at 10:31 to win the title (Roddy Piper was guest referee).



WrestleMania RANKING:

6

Our Comment:

The Razor Ramon-Shawn Michaels ladder match had incredible swings of momentum. It was one thing to bounce out of a pin attempt. It is another to be inches from grabbing the championship belt, only to be toppled 12 feet to the canvas and hope to have enough strength to topple your opponent. Some of the falls taken by both wrestlers were nothing short of incredible. Gimmick matches usually are letdowns, but Michaels appeared to have been wrestling with a ladder in the ring his entire life. Ramon, who seems to improve with every match, showed more guts than he's ever displayed in the squared circle. Ramon won the match and the title, but the effort by Michaels earned him the unofficial title of best wrestler of the half-decade. We hope, as fans, that you witnessed the action. It was the greatest WrestleMania match in history.

—Chris Bernucca, "The Best WrestleMania Match Ever?"
Pro Wrestling Illustrated, August 1994

Your Comment:

I would like to thank Curt Hennig for disqualifying Lex Luger at WrestleMania X. It's about time somebody put Luger in his place, and who's more "perfect" for the job than Hennig, the man Luger cheated at WrestleMania IX? Curt has always been one of the technicians the WWF has overlooked in favor of brawling musclemen like Luger and Hulk Hogan. Now we have in Bret Hart a champion the WWF can be proud of. Hennig may even get a title shot. What a perfect WrestleMania!

—Matthew C. Baker, "Your Letters," *The Wrestler*, September 1994

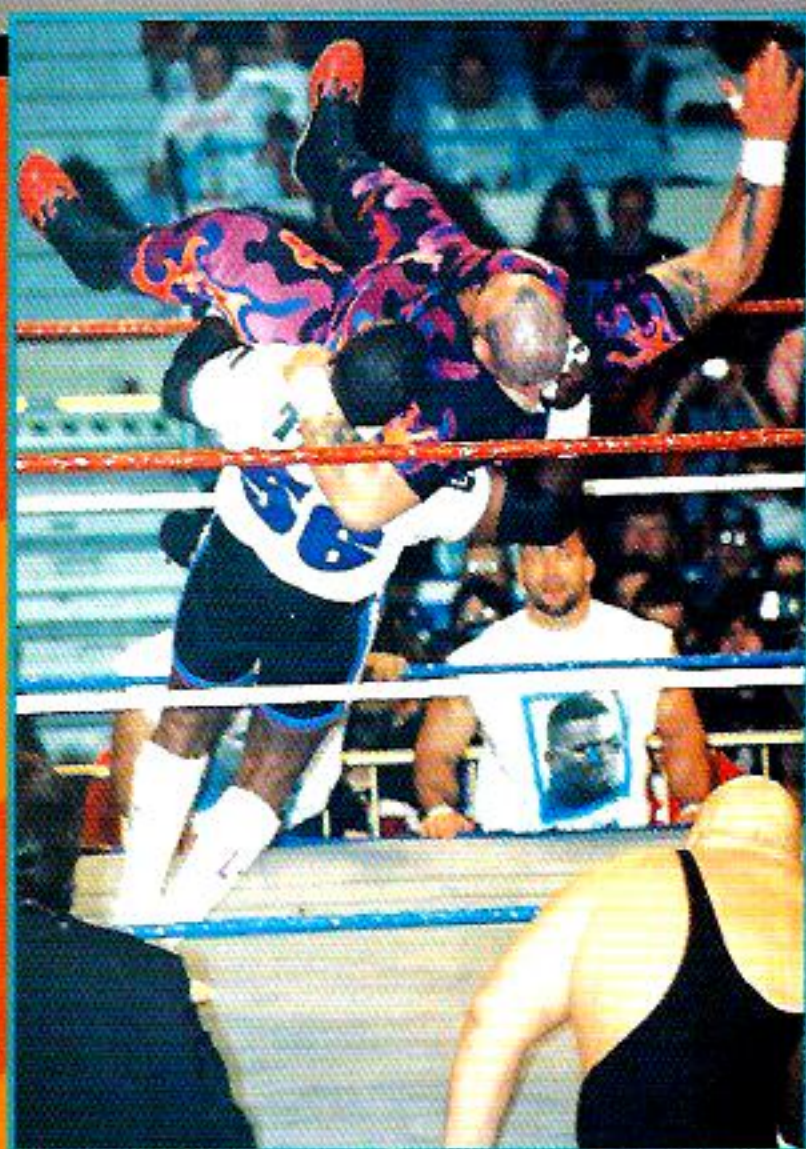
WRESTLEMANIA XI

[04-02-95]

Civic Center, Hartford, CT

RESULTS:

Lex Luger & Davey Boy Smith beat Eli & Jacob Blu at 6:37 ... Razor Ramon beat Intercontinental champ Jeff Jarrett by disqualification at 13:29 when The Roadie interfered ... The Undertaker beat King Kong Bundy at 6:38 ... Owen Hart & Yokozuna won the World tag team belts from The Smokin' Gunns at 9:41 ... Bret Hart beat Bob Backlund in an "I Quit" match at 9:34 ... World champion Diesel pinned Shawn Michaels at 20:40 ... Lawrence Taylor pinned Bam Bam Bigelow in 11:42.



**WrestleMania
RANKING:**

15

Our Comment:

We know, of course, that he's only scheduled one match so far, but I hope Lawrence Taylor doesn't become a wrestler, for two very selfish reasons: One, he may not be very good. It's one thing to watch Michael Jordan flail at slow curveballs, but it's quite another to watch Taylor get battered by a guy like Lex Luger. Because that's what would probably happen. Sure, the skills required to play football and to wrestle are similar, but to think Taylor would be the dominant presence he was on the gridiron is wishful thinking. Ten years worth of football injuries already make him an easy target. The second reason is, whether he succeeds or not, the publicity he'd generate would single-handedly lift the WWF—and Vince "No Hogan, No Pride" McMahon—out of its post-Hogan funk. And I was hoping not to see that happen in this lifetime.

—Eddie Ellner, "Off The Top Rope," *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, July 1995

Your Comment:

Lawrence Taylor would be foolish not to take the highest offer and become a full-time professional wrestler. He proved that he has the natural talent and ability to become a top competitor. All L.T. needs now is a manager to sharpen and shape his talents. With just a little guidance, he'd be a main event wrestler anywhere. He needs to be careful, though, because there are a lot of dishonest managers out there—people like Ted DiBiase—who would love to sabotage his chance at greatness. I think that if he gets the right manager and trainer, he could be the greatest football player to become a professional wrestler yet.

—William Shuyler, "Your Letters," *The Wrestler*, November 1995

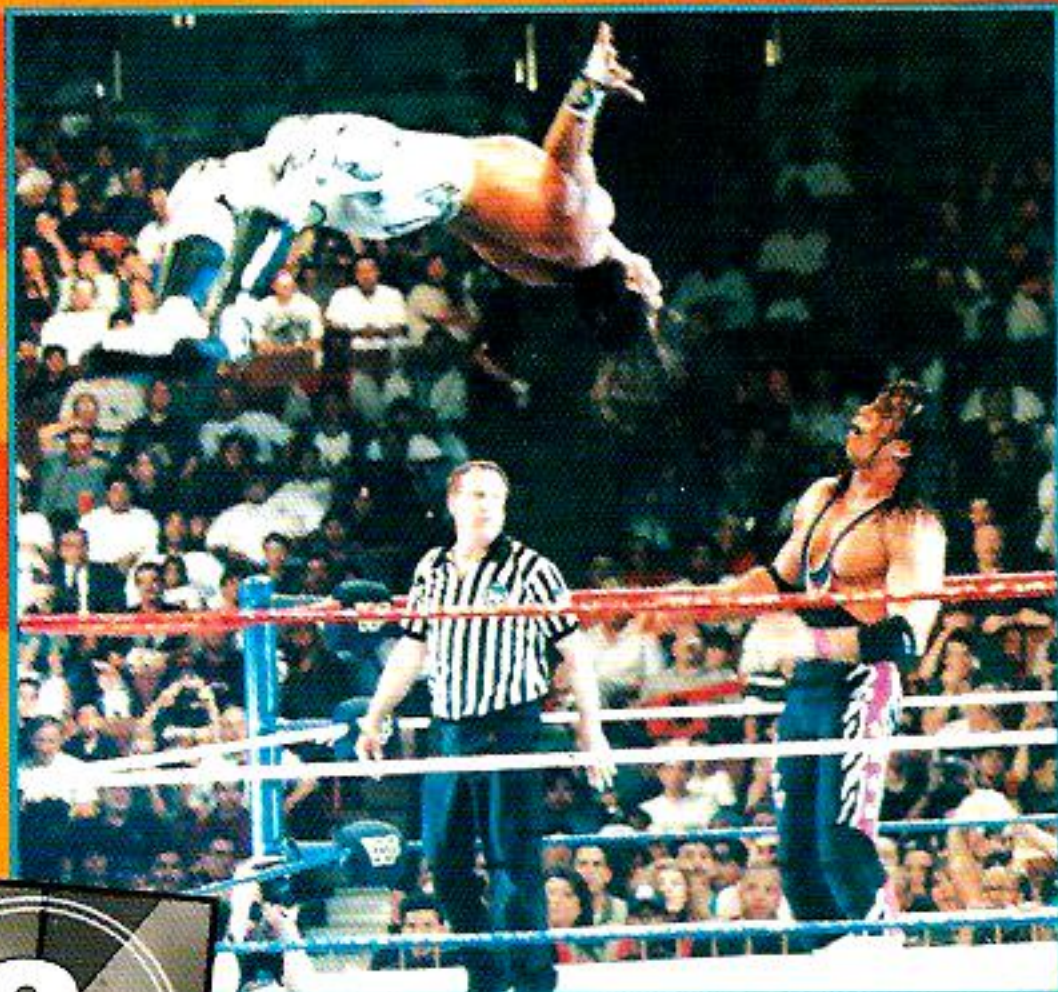
WRESTLEMANIA XII

Arrowhead Pond, Anaheim, CA

[03-31-96]

RESULTS:

Skip & Zip (with Sunny) defeated Henry & Phineas Godwinn in the finals of the tournament for the vacant WWF World tag team title when Skip pinned Phineas at 5:23 ... Owen Hart, Davey Boy Smith, & Big Van Vader defeated Ahmed Johnson, Jake Roberts, & Yokozuna at 13:09 ... Roddy Piper defeated Goldust in a Hollywood back lot brawl ... Steve Austin beat Savio Vega at 10:09 ... The Ultimate Warrior pinned Hunter Hearst Helmsley at 1:38 ... The Undertaker pinned Diesel at 16:44 ... Shawn Michaels beat World champion Bret Hart, one fall to none, in 61:52 of their "Ironman" match to win the belt.



WrestleMania RANKING:



Our Comment:

WrestleMania I. WrestleMania IV. WrestleMania X. WrestleMania XII. One of these WrestleManias is not like the other. One of these WrestleManias just doesn't belong. If you correctly guessed WrestleMania XII, then you, like us, don't count Jose Lothario as a celebrity and didn't catch former baseball star George Foster's appearance at the Slammys. And when WrestleMania XII ended at about 6:55 Pacific Standard time on Sunday night, March 31, you breathed a sigh of relief and said, "They finally did it. A WrestleMania without the sideshow acts!" WrestleMania XII will long be remembered for Diesel vs. The Undertaker, Roddy Piper's parking lot brutalization of Goldust, and the 1996 Match of the Year candidate between Shawn Michaels and Bret Hart, but it will also be remembered for what wasn't on the card: celebrities.

—Dave Rosenbaum, "Finally—The Wrestlers Are The Stars," *Wrestle America*, Summer 1996

Your Comment:

I learned to respect Shawn Michaels last night while viewing WrestleMania XII. I watched him and Bret Hart go at it for over an hour in one of the best matches I've seen in a long time. I still don't like Michaels, but he fought his heart out and he deserved to win the title. I guess under all the dancing and glitz, there really is one hell of a wrestler. How long Shawn remains champion is anybody's guess. Let him beat The Undertaker, Vader, Diesel, and a few more, and even I might be ready to call him the next Ric Flair. Last night was kind of like watching a younger Flair at times. Truthfully, I think you'll keep the belt a while. You're damn good. Yeah, Shawn, you made me respect you last night. Now let's see you make me like you.

—John Teeman, "Your Letters," *The Wrestler*, August 1996

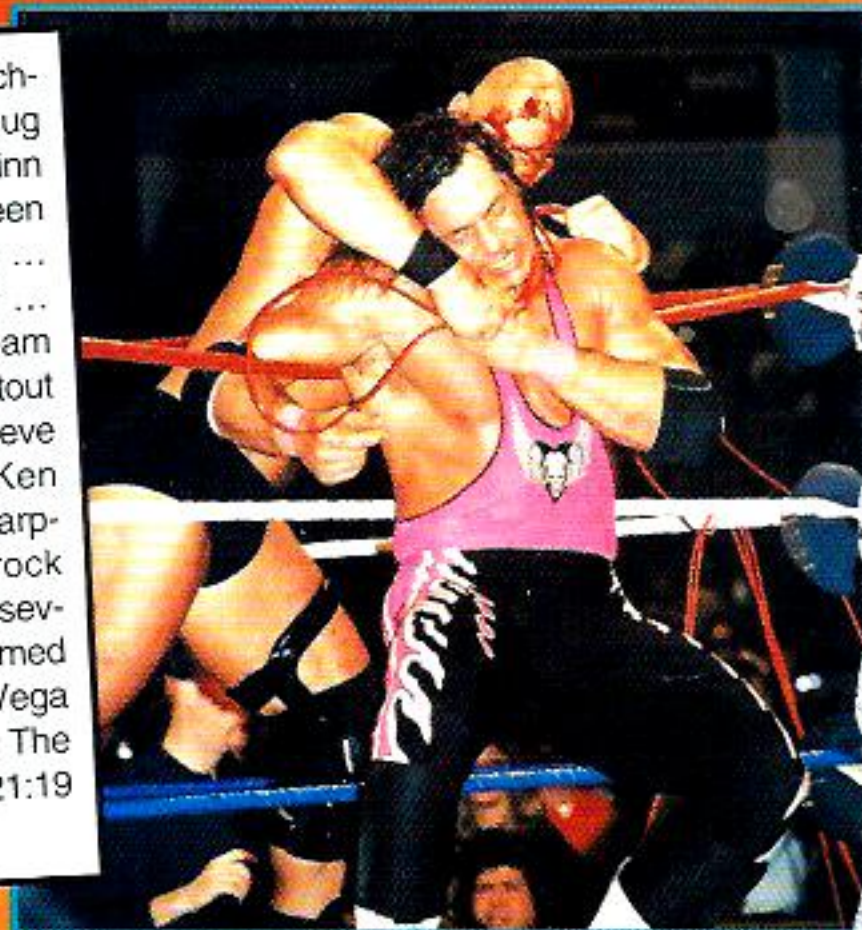
WRESTLEMANIA XIII

Rosemont Horizon, Rosemont, IL

[03-23-97]

RESULTS:

Dark match: Billy Gunn pinned Flash Funk ... Pay-per-view matches: The Headbangers won a four-team elimination match against Doug Furnas and Phil Lafon, The Blackjacks, and Henry & Phineas Godwinn at 10:36 when Mosh pinned Henry Godwinn (The Blackjacks had been eliminated via disqualification, Furnas & Lafon by countout) ... Intercontinental champion Rocky Maivia pinned The Sultan at 9:44 ... Hunter Hearst Helmsley pinned Goldust at 14:12 ... World tag team champs Owen Hart & Davey Boy Smith wrestled to a double-countout with Mankind & Big Van Vader at 16:13 ... Bret Hart defeated Steve Austin in a submission match at 22:04 when guest referee Ken Shamrock stopped the bout when Austin passed out from a sharpshooter (Austin never actually submitted). Afterward, Shamrock slammed Hart when he attacked Austin again, and Austin attacked several referees who tried to help him back to the dressing room ... Ahmed Johnson & The Road Warriors defeated Crush, Faarooq, & Savio Vega in a Chicago streetfight in 10:42 when Animal pinned Crush ... The Undertaker pinned World champion Sid Vicious to win the title at 21:19 after Bret Hart interfered.



WrestleMania RANKING:

10

Our Comment:

Close the polling places. We have our 1997 Match of the Year. We may even have our Wrestler of the Year. At WrestleMania XIII, I witnessed a bloodbath between "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin and Bret "Hitman" Hart. On that night, Austin became a living legend in my book, and Hart finally became a man, rejecting his past, sniveling ways. Austin is setting the bad attitude tone that permeates the WWF right now. He brings out the worst in everyone, and I love it. Bret's bad, Sid's bad sometimes (even though he still gets cheered). Heroes are going down like freaky West Coast cult members. Austin will be World champion by SummerSlam. Take it to the bank. In fact, Austin might now be the patron saint of rulebreaking.

—Brandi Mankiewicz, "Off The Top Rope," *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, August 1997

Your Comment:

It seems that the WWF World title is changing hands faster than an early spring wind changes direction, and now The Undertaker has emerged from WrestleMania with the belt. One has to wonder just how long this is going to last, since there are so many excellent contenders vying for the belt ... The Undertaker might have the belt now, but I don't think it will be too long before Steve Austin gets it. When Austin does take the belt, there may finally be some stability to the WWF World title scene.

—Martha Simmons, "Your Letters," *The Wrestler*, August 1997

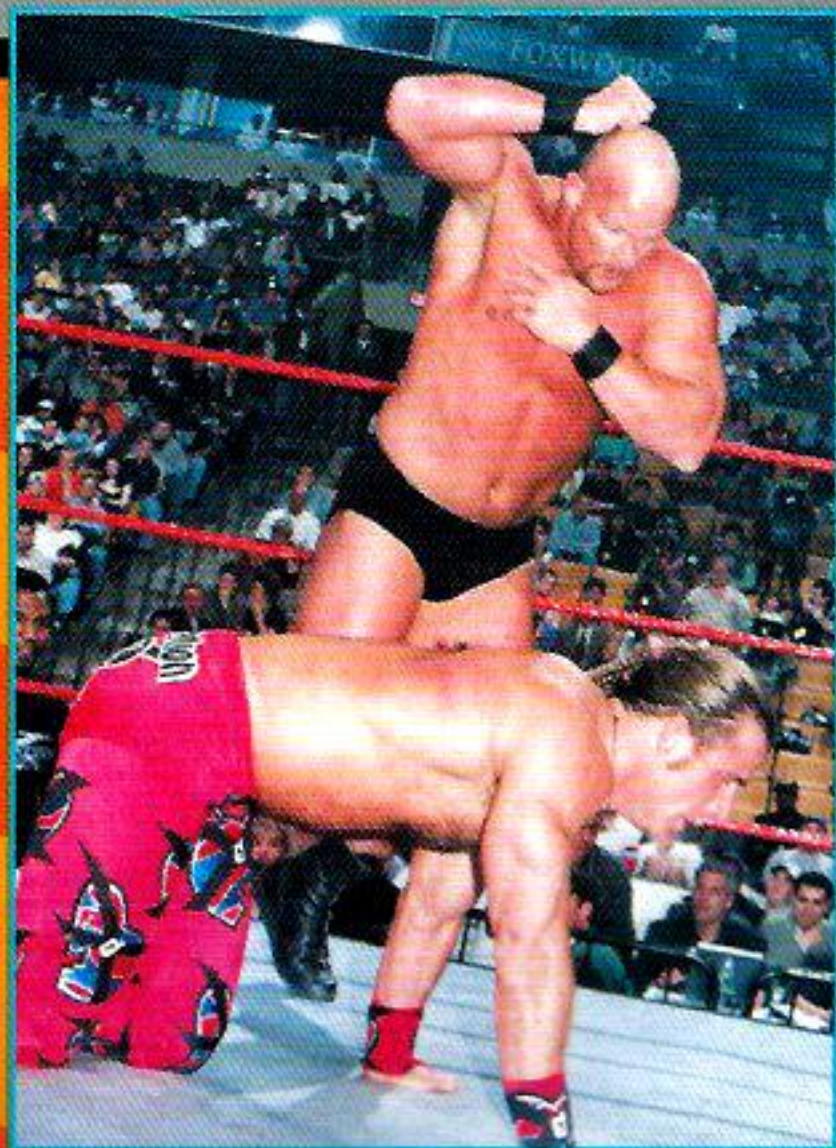
WRESTLEMANIA XIV

FleetCenter, Boston, MA

[03-29-98]

RESULTS:

LOD 2000 won a battle royal, last eliminating The Midnight Express ... Light heavyweight champion Taka Michinoku pinned Aguila ... European champion Hunter Hearst Helmsley pinned Owen Hart ... Marc Mero & Sable defeated Goldust & Luna Vachon ... Intercontinental champion Rocky Maivia defeated Ken Shamrock by reverse decision ... Terry Funk & Cactus Jack defeated World tag team champions Billy Gunn & Jesse James in a dumpster match (the title was later held up) ... The Undertaker pinned Kane ... Steve Austin pinned World champion Shawn Michaels to win the title (Mike Tyson was "ringside enforcer").



WrestleMania RANKING:

2

Our Comment:

From the If You Can't Enforce 'Em, Join 'Em Dept.: Mike Tyson's decision to (pretend to) join DeGeneration X ranks as one of the most surreal events in professional wrestling history. Apparently, Tyson was looking upon his WWF stint as an opportunity to improve his image. But crowds still booed and jeered when he entered arenas. So what's a former disgraced champion to do? Align himself with the bad boys of DX to make the fans hate him more, then make a fast three-count as Austin pins Michaels for the World title in order to make yourself look like a hero. Be careful, Mike, you may not have seen the last of DX ... From the Where Are Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker When You Need Them Dept.: The WrestleMania XIV roster was truly something to behold. The band of misfits included Tyson (banned from boxing), Pete Rose (banned from baseball), and Gennifer Flowers (most likely banned from the White House). I guess O.J. Simpson, Linda Tripp, and Saddam Hussein were busy.

—Brandi Mankiewicz, "Straight Talk," *Wrestle America*, August 1998

Your Comment:

For the second consecutive year, I found WrestleMania to be a major disappointment. WrestleMania XIV was obviously built around the old WWF line that says "(Insert Celebrity Here) is going to be at WrestleMania! And, oh yeah, there's going to be wrestling on the card." Last year's WrestleMania was one of the worst pay-per-views in recent memory, but at least the focus was on the wrestling ... Maybe next year the WWF should take a page from that show and leave the celebrities, Sable, and Luna out. Give the attention to the *wrestlers*, like Steve Austin, Shawn Michaels, and Taka Michinoku. Then again, this is the WWF we're talking about, so the chances of that happening are slim.

—David Hopkins, "Sincerely Yours," *INSIDE WRESTLING*, September 1998

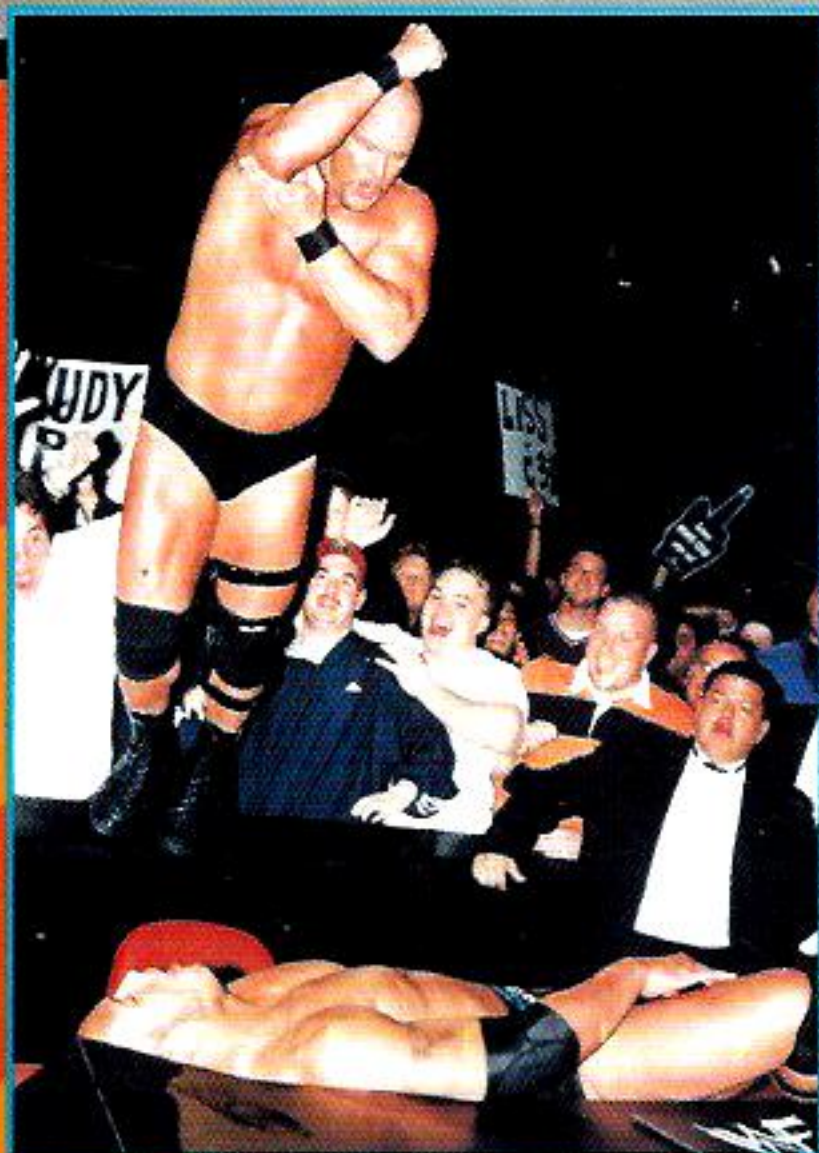
WRESTLEMANIA XV

First Union Center, Philadelphia, PA

[03-28-99]

RESULTS:

Bob Holly beat Al Snow and hardcore champ Billy Gunn in a triple threat match for the belt when he pinned Snow ... World tag team champs Owen Hart & Jeff Jarrett defeated D-Lo Brown & Test ... Butterbean knocked out Bart Gunn in a "Brawl For All" match ... Mankind defeated The Big Show by disqualification ... Intercontinental champion Jesse James beat Goldust, Ken Shamrock, and Val Venis in a four-corner elimination match. Order of elimination: Shamrock and Venis by countout; James pinned Goldust ... Triple-H beat Kane by disqualification when Chyna interfered ... Women's champ Sable pinned Tori after Nicole Bass interfered ... European champ Shane McMahon pinned X-Pac after Triple-H interfered ... The Undertaker pinned Big Bossman in a "Hell In A Cell" match ... Steve Austin pinned World champ The Rock for the title.



WrestleMania RANKING:

22

Our Comment:

WrestleMania XV was a rousing success from both an entertainment and athletic standpoint. The boring matches were short. There wasn't a lot of nonsense, but there was plenty of plot development in just about every feud. Steve Austin vs. The Rock for the WWF World title is a Match of the Year candidate to me. WrestleMania was bad for Vince and great for Vince at the same time. Great for Vince because it made him a bundle of money. Bad for Vince because Austin won back the World belt and Vince got "Stone-Cold" stunned.

—Dave Rosenbaum, "Behind The Dressing Room Door," *INSIDE WRESTLING*, August 1999

Your Comment:

What is going on with Triple-H? When he was with DeGeneration X, he had everything he needed: money, fame, and a great army of wrestlers to back him up. All he's doing now is following in Shawn Michaels' footsteps. He has turned his back on DX and really turned off X-Pac. He is ticking me off so bad that I want to beat the living you-know-what out of him. Did you notice that during WrestleMania XV, Triple-H had to have Shane McMahon and Chyna help him beat up X-Pac? I think X-Pac could beat up Triple-H, and he knows it. Who would leave DeGeneration X for The Corporation?

—Cameron Hinkley, "Sincerely Yours," *INSIDE WRESTLING*, September 1999

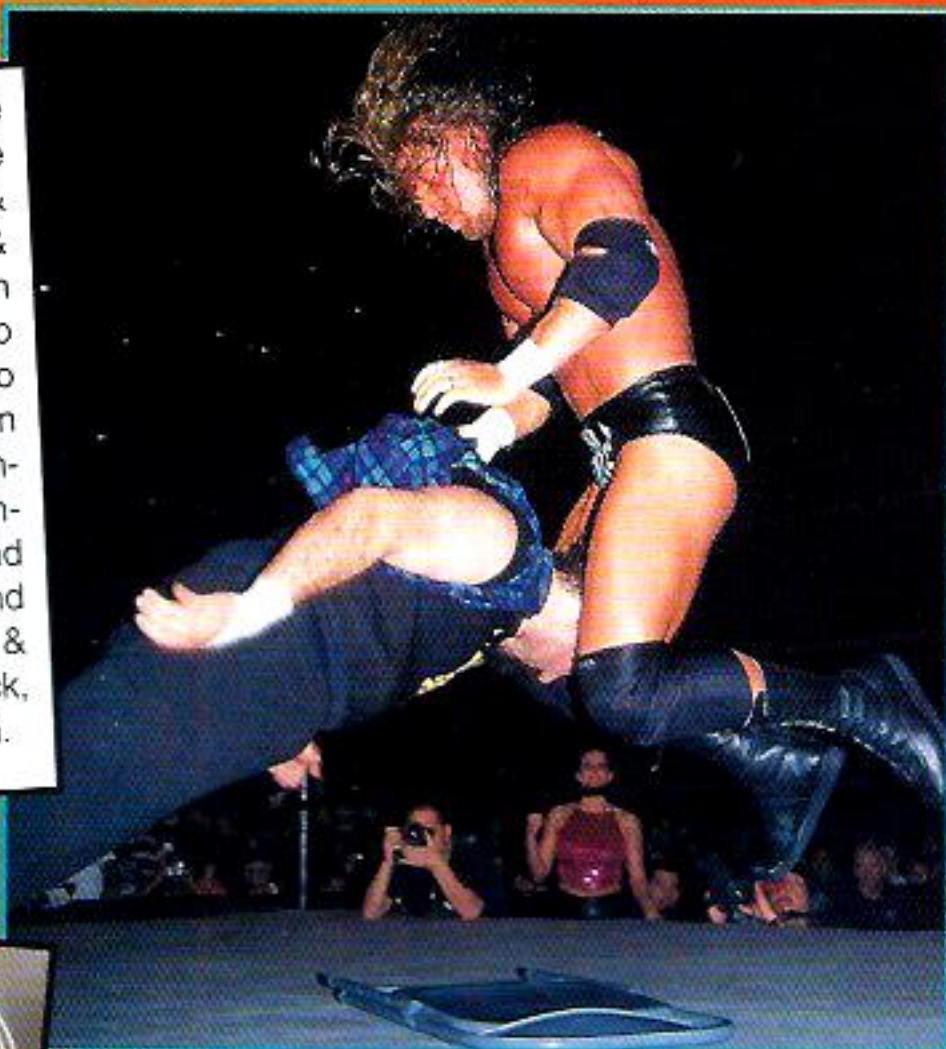
WRESTLEMANIA 2000

Arrowhead Pond, Anaheim, CA

[04-02-00]

RESULTS:

Big Bossman & Bull Buchanan defeated The Godfather & D-Lo Brown ... Hardcore Holly won the hardcore battle royal to win the hardcore title ... Test & Albert beat Al Snow & Steve Blackman ... Edge & Christian beat The Hardy Boyz and World tag team champs The Dudley Boyz in a three-way ladder match to win the title ... Terri defeated The Kat ... Chyna & Too Cool beat Eddie Guerrero, Perry Saturn, & Dean Malenko ... Chris Benoit beat Chris Jericho and Intercontinental/European champion Kurt Angle to win the Intercontinental title in the match's first fall; in the second fall for the European title, Jericho defeated Benoit and Angle to win the title ... Kane & Rikishi beat X-Pac & Road Dogg ... World champion Triple-H beat The Rock, Mick Foley, and The Big Show in a fatal four-way match.



WrestleMania RANKING:

11

Our Comment:

The big show has come and gone, and all I can say is WM2000 was *not* a show for the ages. The wrestling was solid, the show was ... *Raw Is War*. For the second straight year, Vince McMahon and the WWF did little to distinguish the biggest card of the year from just another Monday night. Absent were the coterie of mainstream celebrities and unexpected twists and turns that have made WrestleMania the pinnacle of sports entertainment. Vince McMahon is probably right. The WWF may no longer need mainstream stars to draw an audience, since The Rock and Triple-H are such established attractions, but for the price of a ticket (or PPV broadcast), the fans deserve more than what they can see on USA for free.

—Frank Krewda, "Krew-Cuts," *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, September 2000

Your Comment:

The Rock was not the biggest winner of WrestleMania 2000. I mean, it's pretty easy to figure out that Triple-H was the biggest winner to come out of WrestleMania 2000. Not only did he leave with the WWF World title belt still strapped around his waist, but that main event also led to the formation of the McMahon-Helmsley Regime, of which, as the WWF champion, he is the most important member. Besides, ever since WrestleMania 2000, The Rock hasn't looked a lot like a champion. Triple-H, though, is slowly becoming the best WWF champion of all-time.

—Daniel Pitell, "Sincerely Yours," *INSIDE WRESTLING*, November 2000

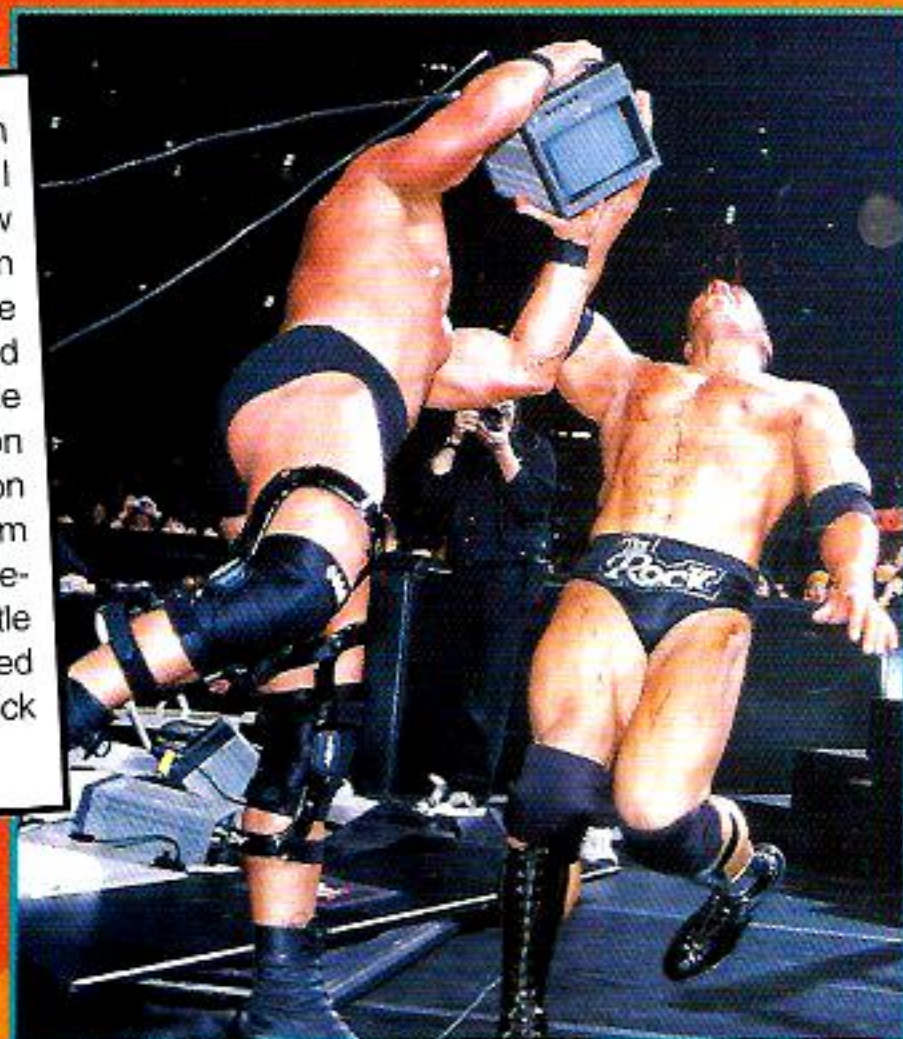
WRESTLEMANIA X-7

Astrodome, Houston, TX

[04-01-01]

RESULTS:

Intercontinental champion Chris Jericho pinned William Regal ... Bradshaw, Faarooq, & Tazz defeated Bull Buchanan, The Goodfather, & Val Venis when Bradshaw pinned Goodfather ... Kane defeated hardcore champion Raven and The Big Show in a three-way match to win the title when he pinned Show ... Eddie Guerrero pinned European champion Test to capture the title ... Kurt Angle pinned Chris Benoit ... Chyna pinned women's champion Ivory for the title ... Shane McMahon pinned Vince McMahon in a streetfight ... Christian & Edge defeated World tag team champions The Dudley Boyz and The Hardy Boyz in a three-way TLC match ... The Iron Sheik won the gimmick battle royal, last eliminating Hillbilly Jim ... The Undertaker pinned Triple-H ... Steve Austin pinned World champion The Rock to win the title after Vince McMahon interfered.



**WrestleMania
RANKING:**

14

Our Comment:

Thumbs Down to Steve Austin. When "Stone-Cold" defeated WWF champ The Rock at WrestleMania X-7 with the help of Vince McMahon, the wrestling world was shocked. Not since Hulk Hogan joined Kevin Nash and Scott Hall in the creation of the NWO in 1996 had a heel turn been undertaken with such precision. In just minutes, Austin went from being one of the world's most honorable wrestlers to one of the most despicable. When he exposed his partnership with former rival Triple-H on the following night's Raw and accosted Jim Ross at Smackdown, Austin fans everywhere wanted to puke. Austin's "Stone-Cold," all right—a "Stone-Cold" phony.

—Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down, *The Wrestler*, September 2001

Your Comment:

Deep down inside, Rob Van Dam must be pretty mad that Shane McMahon used the move he invented just a few months ago, the "Van-terminator," at the biggest show of the year, WrestleMania X-7. Maybe RVD is saying all the right things publicly about it, but I bet he's quietly seething. Maybe it wouldn't have been so bad if the WWF had signed him by now, but it hasn't happened yet. If the WWF does want to bring him in, maybe this could be the perfect hook. Let him come on Raw one night and call out Shane. Then he could rip Shane for taking his move and join Vince McMahon's faction.

—Eric Farley, "Your Letters," *The Wrestler*, September 2001

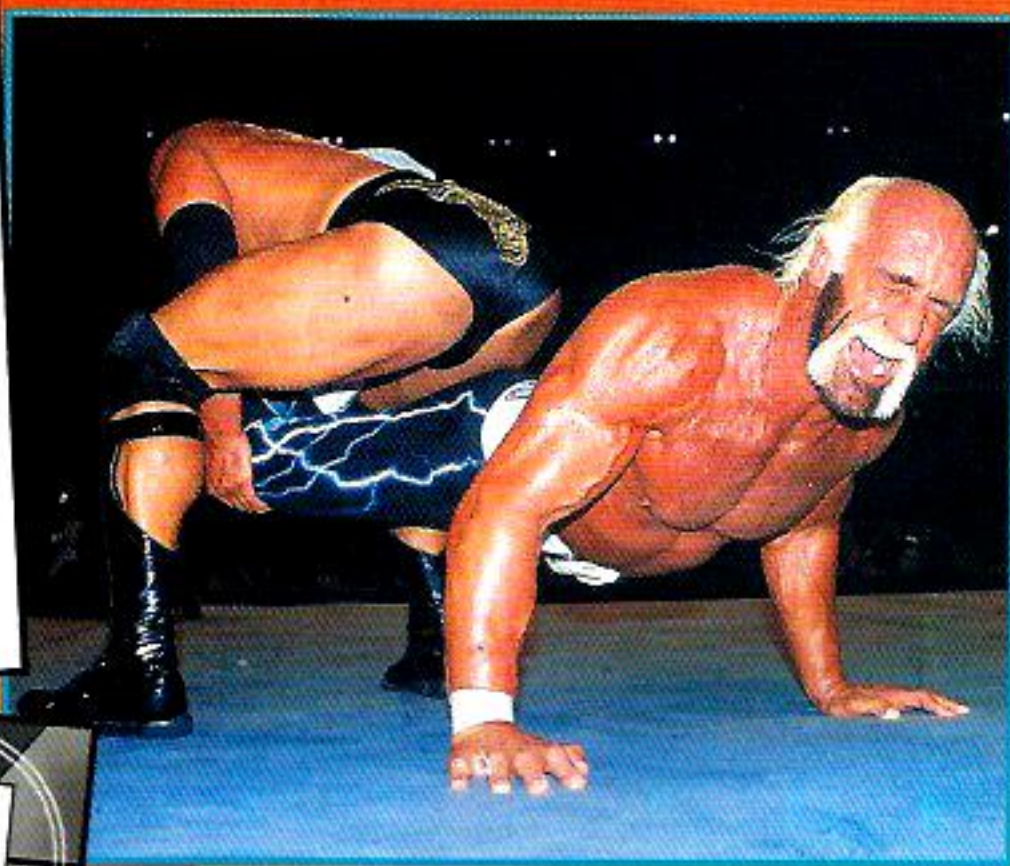
WRESTLEMANIA X8

SkyDome, Toronto, Ontario

(03-17-02)

RESULTS:

Rob Van Dam pinned Intercontinental champion William Regal to win the title ... European champion Dallas Page pinned Christian ... Spike Dudley pinned hardcore champion Maven during Maven's match with Goldust to win the title. The title would go from Dudley to The Hurricane to Mighty Molly to Christian and back to Maven by the time the show was over ... Kurt Angle pinned Kane ... The Undertaker pinned Ric Flair ... Edge pinned Booker T ... Steve Austin pinned Scott Hall ... World tag team champions Billy Gunn & Chuck Palumbo beat The Hardy Boyz, The Dudley Boyz, and Bradshaw & Faarooq in a four-way elimination match ... The Rock pinned Hulk Hogan ... Women's champion Jazz defeated Trish Stratus and Lita in a three-way match ... Triple-H pinned World champion Chris Jericho to win the title.



**WrestleMania
RANKING:**

21

Our Comment:

Hulk Hogan vs. The Rock. Their WrestleMania X8 encounter literally brought a lump to my throat. Not so much the mat action (which far exceeded everyone's wildest hopes), but more so the way the fans reacted to this legend of legends. Hogan's been called the Babe Ruth of wrestling, which is a pretty accurate comparison considering the impact both men made on their respective sports, but I was concerned that the WWF fans would show resentment toward him for his prominent role on the wrong side of the war between the WWF and WCW and for the "smart view" that he had selfishly hung on past his time at the expense of up-and-comers. Yes, he was a WWF hero at one point, but that era had essentially passed, and only a small portion of the fans had experienced "Hulkamania" for themselves. But wrestling fans proved they know who Hulk Hogan is, what he's accomplished, and what impact those accomplishments have had in shaping the industry. And they let him have it ... right in the heart. If I was choked up by their reaction, one could only have imagined how the big man felt.

—Stu Saks, "From The Desk Of ..." *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, August 2002

Your Comment:

I think the Rock-Hogan match illustrated—more than any other WrestleMania contest—how the loser can really emerge the winner ... Hogan has a consistent record for his professionalism, and his ability to remain a main-eventer during the past 20 years. "Hollywood" will continue to exceed the expectations of smart fans and wrestling journalists because they always underestimate ... the power of "Hulkamania." I, along with millions of other fans, did not.

—Melissa McDonough, "Your Letters," *The Wrestler*, October 2002

WRESTLEMANIA XIX

(03-30-03)

Safeco Field, Seattle, WA

RESULTS:

Cruiserweight champion Matt Hardy pinned Rey Mysterio Jr. ... The Undertaker defeated A-Train & The Big Show in a handicap match when he pinned A-Train ... Trish Stratus defeated women's champion Victoria and Jazz in a three-way match to win the title when she pinned Victoria ... Smackdown tag team champions Shelton Benjamin & Charlie Haas defeated Eddie & Chavo Guerrero Jr. and Chris Benoit & Rhyno in a three-way match when Benjamin pinned Chavo Guerrero Jr. ... Shawn Michaels pinned Chris Jericho ... Raw champion Triple-H pinned Booker T ... Hulk Hogan pinned Vince McMahon in a streetfight ... The Rock pinned Steve Austin ... Brock Lesnar pinned Smackdown champion Kurt Angle to win the title.

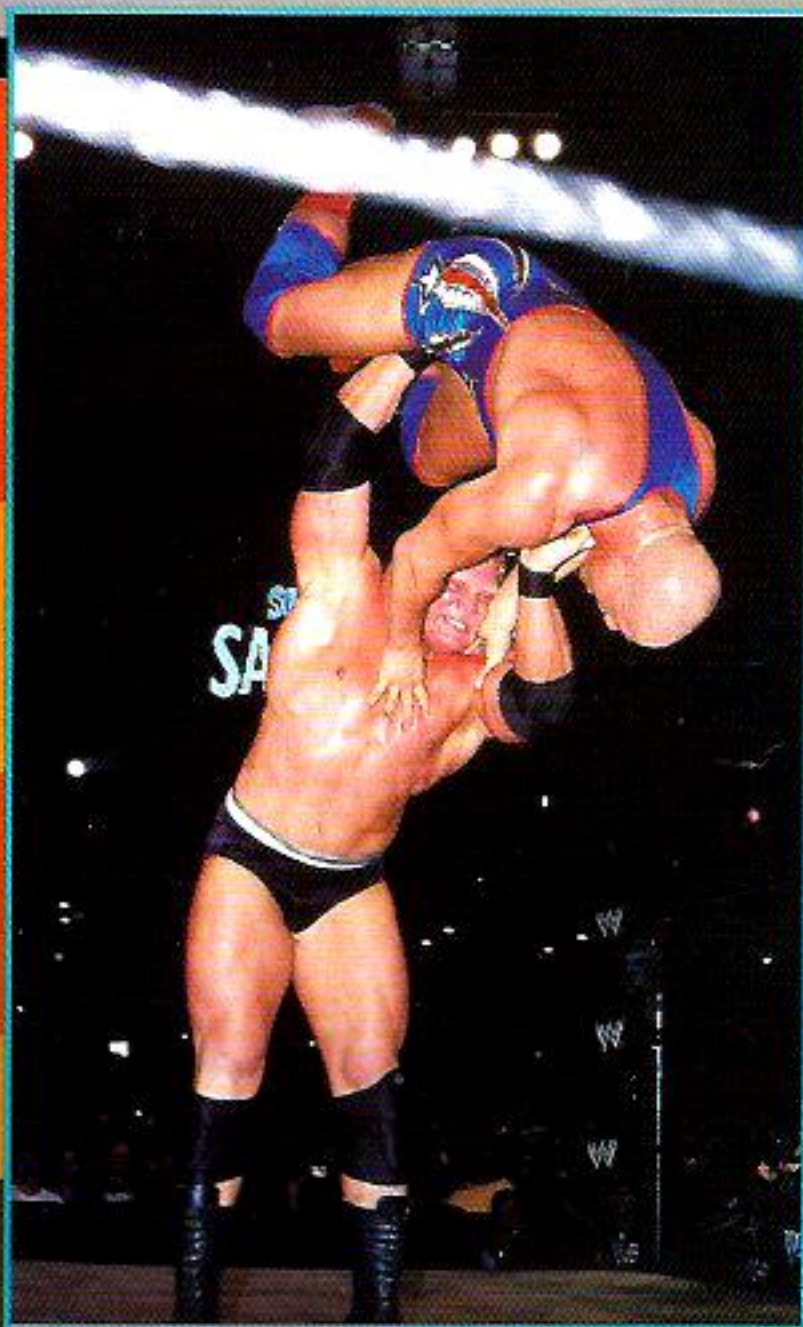
WrestleMania RANKING:



Our Comment:

The match: Kurt Angle vs. Brock Lesnar. The winner: Lesnar, when he pinned Angle at 21:02 to win the Smackdown championship. The real winner: Angle, who entered the match needing neck surgery to repair spinal damage and thus was supposed to wrestle a safe match, yet ended up delivering one of the best matches of his career. While we don't condone Angle's decision to wrestle with such a serious neck injury, we will commend him on his gutsy performance. He didn't hold back one iota. The man is an amazing performer. Another winner: John Cena, who was probably hoping to see Lesnar win, so his feud with him could be over the Smackdown title. Yet another winner: Lesnar, who defied possible paralysis (or worse!) after landing on his head during his attempt at the shooting star press. There's no reason that a man his size should be attempting that maneuver in such an exhausted state; it's highly doubtful that we'll ever see him use it again.

—Will Welsh, "WrestleMania XIX: The Real Winners & Losers," *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, August 2003



Your Comment:

Angle and Lesnar set an impossibly high standard for themselves, considering Angle was injured and this was Lesnar's first WrestleMania. But after it was over, I asked myself whether it was worthy of WrestleMania. No matter how you pick it apart, it was WrestleMania-worthy."

—Marie Benesto, "Between Falls," *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, August 2003

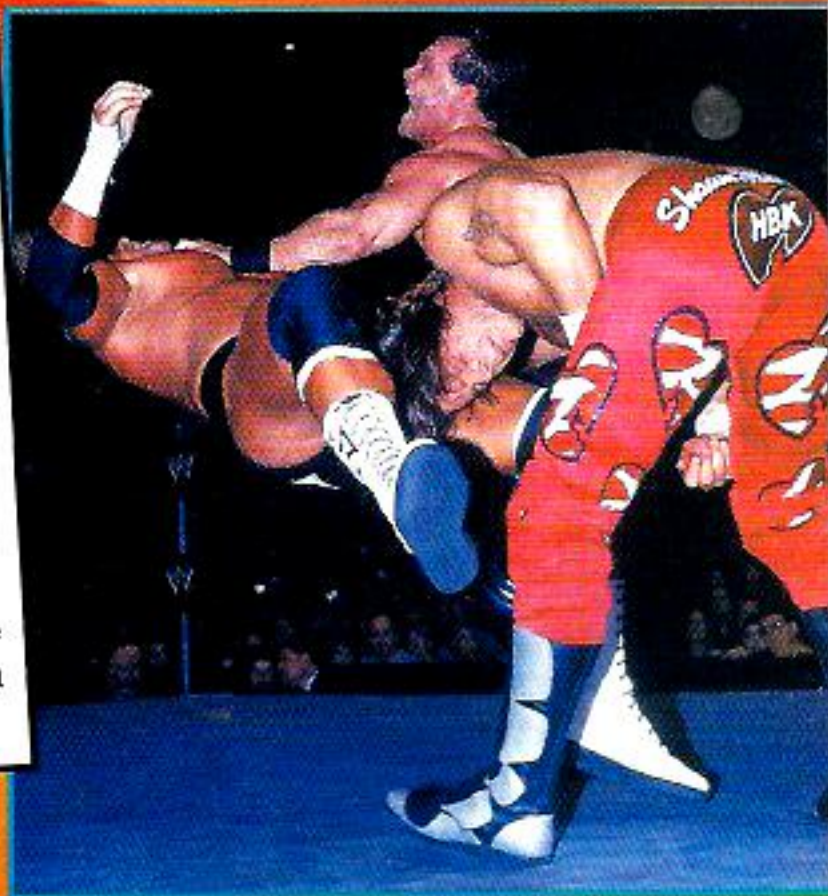
WRESTLEMANIA XX

Madison Square Garden, New York, NY

(03-14-04)

RESULTS:

John Cena pinned U.S. champion The Big Show to win the title ... Raw tag team champions Booker T & Rob Van Dam defeated Mark Jindrak & Garrison Cade, Buh Buh Ray & D-Von Dudley, and Robert Conway & Rene Dupree in a fatal four-way match when Van Dam pinned Conway ... Christian pinned Chris Jericho ... Ric Flair, Randy Orton, & Batista beat Mick Foley & The Rock in a handicap match when Orton pinned Foley ... Torrie Wilson & Sable defeated Jackie Gayda & Stacy Keibler in an evening gown match when Wilson pinned Gayda ... Cruiserweight champion Chavo Guerrero Jr. won a 10-man cruiserweight gauntlet match, pinning Rey Mysterio Jr. ... Bill Goldberg pinned Brock Lesnar (Steve Austin was the guest referee) ... Smackdown tag team champions Rikishi & Scotty Too Hotty defeated The Basham Brothers, Shelton Benjamin & Charlie Haas, and Bradshaw & Faarooq in a fatal four-way match when Rikishi pinned Danny Basham ... Women's champion Victoria pinned Molly Holly ... Smackdown champion Eddie Guerrero pinned Kurt Angle ... The Undertaker pinned Kane ... Chris Benoit defeated Raw champ Triple-H and Shawn Michaels in a three-way match to win the title when he forced Triple-H to tap out.



WrestleMania RANKING:

13

Our Comment:

Obviously, Vince McMahon wasn't kidding when he said WrestleMania XX would be "where it all begins again," meaning that he didn't settle for nostalgia acts. Believe it or not, wrestling was presented as a sport again. Whether it was Guerrero beating Angle, or Benoit winning the three-way, casual viewers—and I'm talking about the ones who might buy a WrestleMania pay-per-view once in a great while, and might not even really keep up the rest of the year—have to think, *Boy, this has really come a long way since that Hulk Hogan and Mr. T crap, or even Sgt. Slaughter dressing up like an Iraqi and huffing and puffing through a so-called main event against Hogan.*

—Brandi Mankiewicz, "Editors' Roundtable," *The Wrestler*/INSIDE WRESTLING, Volume 1, 2004

Your Comment:

WrestleMania XX has come and gone, but did it "all begin again," like Vince McMahon said it would? I can't tell. Eddie Guerrero is the Smackdown champion. Chris Benoit is the Raw champion. I should be so shocked out of my seat that I can't wait to see what will happen next, but instead I'm yawning. I'm not what you would call a "smart" fan. I'm just a fan. I'm not that jaded. I appreciate grappling, brawling, hardcore, luchadores, puroresu, and gimmicks. So why am I not more excited? Is any of the stuff going on in WWE helping to guarantee the future success of this company and the business in general? Are new fans being grown?

—Scott Hunt, "Sincerely Yours," *Inside Wrestling*, November 2004

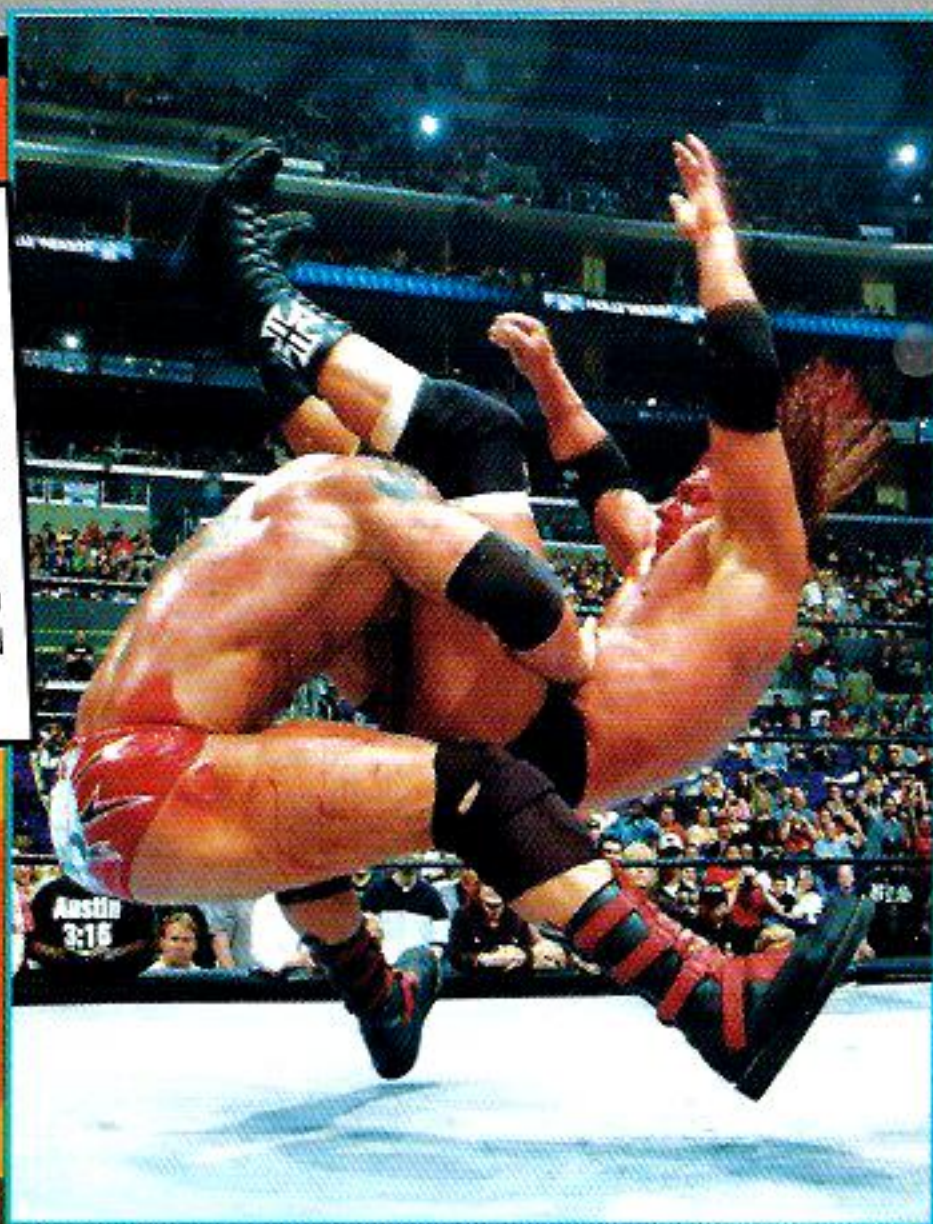
WRESTLEMANIA 21

(04-03-05)

Staples Center, Los Angeles, CA

RESULTS:

Rey Mysterio Jr. pinned Eddie Guerrero ... Edge won a six-way "Money-In-The-Bank" ladder match against Shelton Benjamin, Chris Jericho, Chris Benoit, Christian, and Kane ... The Undertaker pinned Randy Orton ... Women's champion Trish Stratus pinned Christy Hemme ... Kurt Angle defeated Shawn Michaels by submission ... Akebono beat The Big Show in a sumo match ... John Cena pinned Raw World champion John Bradshaw Layfield to win the title ... Batista pinned Raw World champion Triple-H to win the title.



WrestleMania RANKING:



Our Comment:

Headed into WrestleMania 21, most industry experts thought Batista had a better than 50/50 chance of dethroning Triple-H. Batista made good on his promise—and now he's the Raw World champion. But the true test lies ahead. WWE's fate rests on his broad shoulders. Does Batista have what it takes? The entire wrestling community is asking the question. Vince McMahon is asking himself that question. So is WWE Creative. So is Triple-H. So is our editorial staff. From the highest-paid WWE Superstars all the way down to the indie wrestlers who lose every match and sweep popcorn from under the folding chairs as fans file out, everyone is wondering if Batista is the superstar who will ignite the next wrestling boom. Only three wrestlers in WWE history have been capable of that: Bruno Sammartino, Hulk Hogan, and Steve Austin. Does Batista have a shot at joining that pantheon? I think he does. Let me clarify that a bit. I think Batista has a better chance of becoming WWE's next megastar than anyone else that has come along since Austin and The Rock were regular main-eventers.

—Harry Burkett, "Blindsided," *The Wrestler/INSIDE WRESTLING*, Volume 3, 2005

Your Comment:

The best matches at WrestleMania 21 were the lighter-weight bouts. The heavyweight title matches did not deliver as they should have. Add to that the fact that the sumo match between The Big Show and Akebono that should have been held at a zoo and you get my point. Not-so-heavy wrestlers, in both WWE and TNA, seem to be where more of the action is, and I think they need to be pushed a little more than the heavyweight slow dancers.

—Rey Sifuentes Jr., "Your Letters," *The Wrestler/INSIDE WRESTLING*, Volume 3, 2005

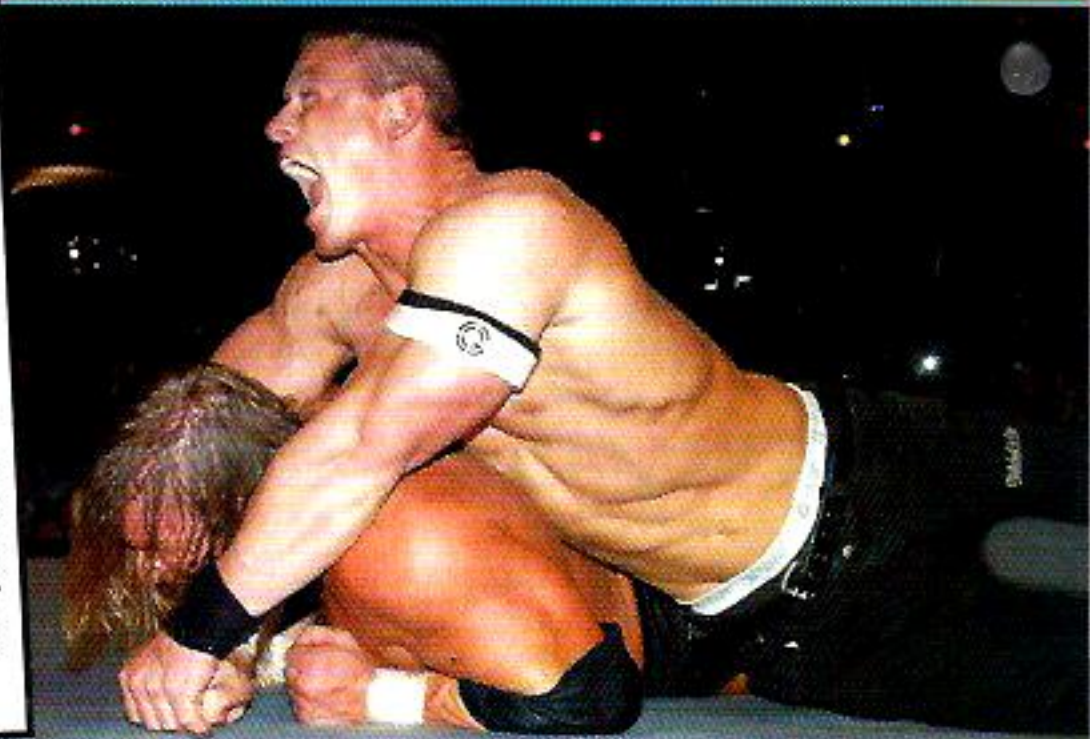
WRESTLEMANIA 22

Allstate Arena, Chicago, IL

[04-02-06]

RESULTS:

Raw World tag team champions The Big Show & Kane defeated Chris Masters & Carlito ... Rob Van Dam won the six-way "Money-In-The-Bank" ladder match also involving Bobby Lashley, Matt Hardy, Finlay, Ric Flair, and Shelton Benjamin ... John Bradshaw Layfield beat Chris Benoit to win the U.S. championship ... Edge defeated Mick Foley in a hardcore match ... The Boogeyman beat Booker T & Sharmell in a handicap match ... Mickie James pinned Trish Stratus to win the women's championship ... The Undertaker beat Mark Henry in aasket match ... Shawn Michaels pinned Vince McMahon in a streetfight ... Rey Mysterio Jr. beat Randy Orton and Kurt Angle in a three-way match to win the Smackdown World championship ... Torrie Wilson defeated Candice Michelle in a "Playboy Pillow Fight" match ... Raw World champion John Cena beat Triple-H by submission.



WrestleMania RANKING:

20

Our Comment:

The top two stories of the night were the Smackdown and Raw heavyweight title matches, though maybe now I won't be able to refer to the World title as a "heavyweight" championship. Rey Mysterio Jr. gutted his way to the title in the emotional highlight of the show. I, for one, was happy for him. I don't care much for the lucha style in general, but I respect Rey for everything he has achieved in this sport through the years. He may be the most influential competitor of this generation, opening doors for every hard-working wrestler who isn't blessed with a 6'3" frame. I don't see a long reign ahead of him, but I'm happy to see he got his moment in the sun. As for John Cena upsetting Triple-H, it was impressive. But I'm reserving judgment until I see him do it again.

—Matt Brock, "Plain Speaking," *The Wrestler/INSIDE WRESTLING*, Volume 9, 2006

Your Comment:

I am so happy and proud of Rey Mysterio Jr. He has accomplished so much, and he deserves all of it! He may be the smallest man on the Smackdown brand, but that doesn't stop him from being a *great* wrestler! I am so glad and happy—as is Rey I'm sure—that JBL is gone. All he did was make Rey's wrestling life a living hell! I don't care what was said: Rey deserved the Smackdown World championship. Rey has tons of fans—including me—and there is no one that could ever replace him! The same goes for a really good friend of Rey's, named Eddie Guerrero. The men actually counted each other as brothers. Eddie's death was shocking to everybody and a lot of people miss him very much.

—Abby Gonzalez, "Your Letters," *The Wrestler/INSIDE WRESTLING*, Volume 9, 2006

Sting

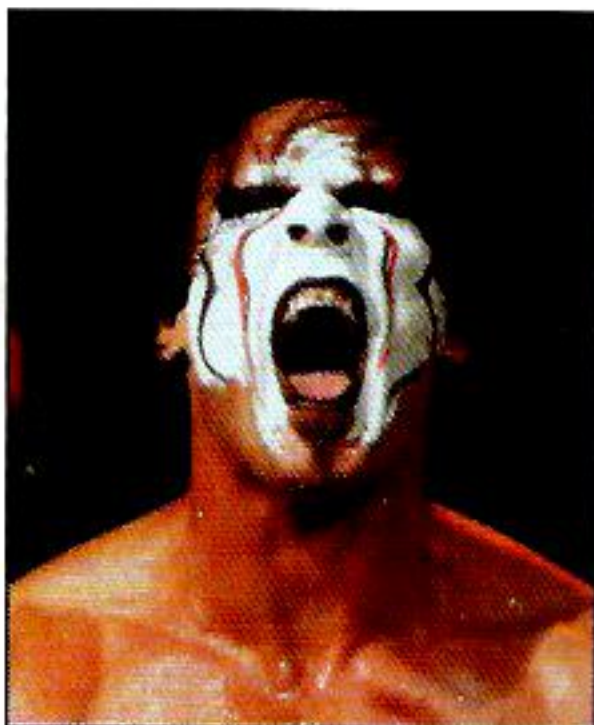
"I should be the face of TNA in 2007"

THERE ARE FEW wrestlers who have had a more recognizable presence in professional wrestling over the past two decades than Sting. The charismatic former NWA and WCW World champion has maintained a loyal following since his early days in Bill Watts' UWF and has built a career around being a bankable fan favorite.

Since officially returning to wrestling on New Year's Day 2006, Sting has taken the reins of TNA and has given the promotion the credibility it had been seeking throughout its four-year existence. Whether he was salvaging the honor of WCW in the promotion's war against the New World Order or silently nestled in the rafters plotting his next move, Sting was an icon of the wrestling boom of the mid-1990s.

Never one to mince words, Sting made his intentions for his tenure with TNA crystal clear. After achieving all of his goals during his 21-year career, Sting's motivation was to help make TNA a viable option for fans disenchanted with the current state of the sport.

Yet, as Sting became more successful, his focus seemed to change from assisting the company to once again becoming NWA World champion, a feat that he accomplished at TNA's Bound for Glory in October. Although that title reign would be brief, the experience left the future Hall of Famer with a renewed passion—if not obsession—with reclaiming the gold.



"I don't mean any disrespect toward Abyss—he's a talented young wrestler with a great career ahead of him—but I don't feel as if it was his time just yet, especially at my expense."

With most of his career behind him, it seemed only natural that Sting would look to be a mentor to the younger talent that will be the future of the industry he helped revive. However, Sting seems to be in no rush to hang up the boots for good. His passion for the business has been renewed since joining TNA and, physically, he's as good as he was in his prime. All signs point to the enigmatic grappler hanging around Orlando well past his one-year contract.

Sting recently sat down with

INSIDE WRESTLING Senior Writer Frank Ingiosi to discuss the direction of TNA, who he feels is wasting their talent, and how he figures to play a part in the further development of the promotion.

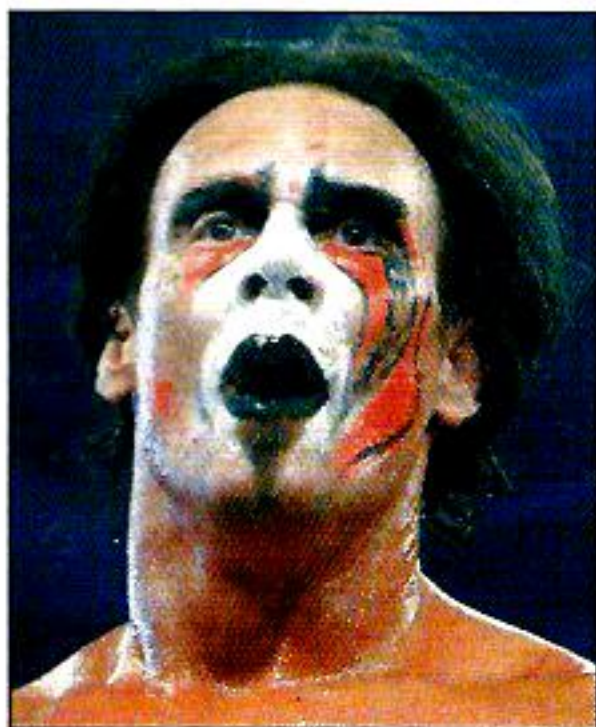
Q: Let me thank you for taking the time to sit down and speak with me during such a turbulent time in your career. If you don't mind, I'd like to get right to the question that's been on everyone's mind: What's the deal with the new paint?

A: (Laughs) Right to the hard stuff, I see. Well, I felt like it was time for a change. You know, new attitude, new opportunities, new look. It was a way to blend the "Stinger" of the past with the present. I kind of like it.

Q: All right, with that out of the way, on to some less heady stuff. How devastated were you with the result of your brief NWA World title run?

A: Well, at least you left the easy stuff for last (laughs). What can I say outside of the fact that it was tremendously disappointing to work that hard only to have the NWA World title stolen from me because of a technicality. I don't mean any disrespect toward Abyss—he's a talented young wrestler with a great career ahead of him—but I don't feel as if it was his time just yet, especially at my expense.

Q: Take us back to that night of the Genesis pay-per-view. What could have possibly gone



"Honestly, working with Christian was part of the reason I kept coming back. We were very tight, although I have to admit I saw the signs that there was something dark in the man."

through your head when you heard you had lost the World title via disqualification of all things?

A: To be honest, it was pretty much a blur. One moment, I'm feeling as if I have the match in control and I'm coasting. The next, I'm a former champion. It was ... surreal. I can't remember the last time—if ever—that I've allowed my emotions to get the best of me like that. It felt good to run like I used to, but I suppose I paid for it.

Q: Would you please describe the toll on one's life that the preparations associated with, as well as the defense of, a world championship—however brief—has on a wrestler at this stage of his career?

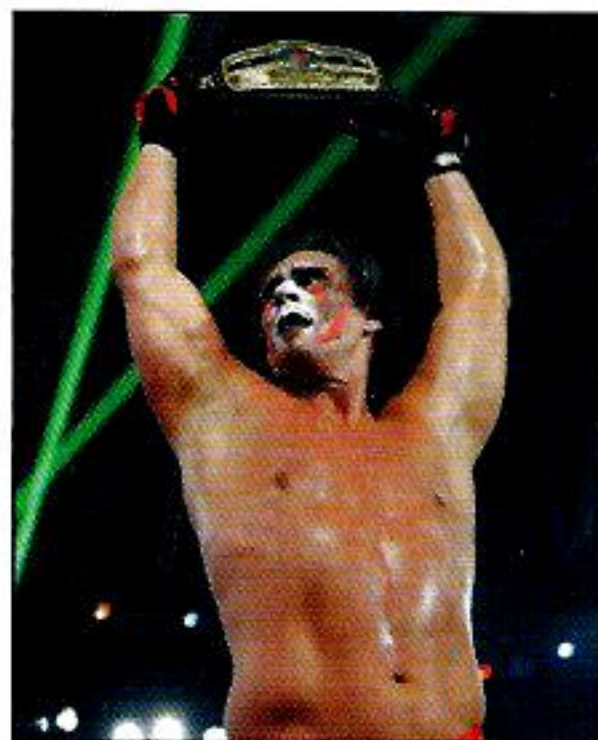
A: It's probably the toughest thing I've ever had to do in my career. I worked my tail off to get into the best shape of my life. I feel as if I sacrificed a lot—both personally and professionally—in the process, and to be on such a tremendous high for such a short period of time is quite a setback.

Throughout my career, I've seen a setback like this destroy wrestlers. The physical and emotional toll is just too much for some, but not me. I'm going to get the NWA World championship back whatever the cost. I've worked too hard to settle for anything less.

Q: After your match with Abyss, you reached out to the new NWA World champion over the following weeks on *Impact* in a way that few, if any, former champions would have. Why?

A: As I said, I have a certain level of respect for the guy. He could have a great career ahead of him assuming he can remove the negative influences from his life. I feel like, if I could just get through to him, he could have the type of career I believe he's capable of. Then again, it might have just been a little bit of gamesmanship.

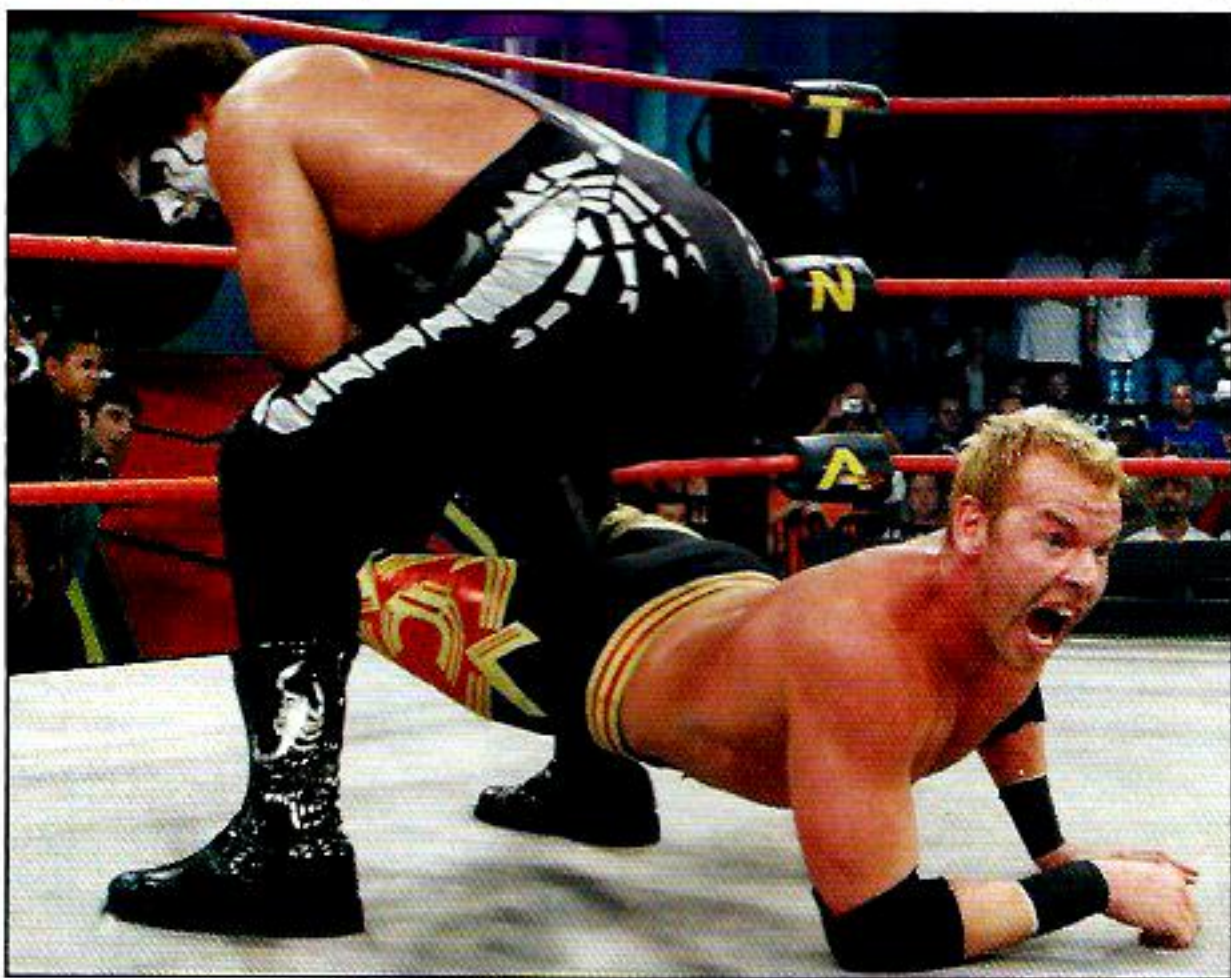
Q: One of TNA's strongest selling points is its ability to blend up-and-coming talent with bigger, well-established names, such as yourself. I'd like to get your thoughts on a few newcomers to TNA, who, like you, enjoyed success elsewhere, thus making your veteran presence vital



to the success of the company. Of course, I'm speaking of Christian Cage—with whom I believe you're fairly well-acquainted—and the much heralded Kurt Angle.

A: Ahh, Christian. Where do I begin? I had nothing but respect for the guy from the moment I watched him show up in Orlando. I followed his career very closely

to the success of the company. Of course, I'm speaking of Christian Cage—with whom I believe you're fairly well-acquainted—and the much heralded Kurt Angle.



Sting highly respected Christian Cage until recently—although he admits suspecting "Captain Charisma" always had a dark side. "The Stinger" says that Cage's impatience has caused him to lose his focus and his spot in the NWA World title race.

and really enjoyed his athleticism and enthusiasm for the sport. Honestly, working with Christian was part of the reason I kept coming back. We were very tight, although I have to admit I saw the signs that there was something dark in the man.

Q: What do you mean?

A: Christian doesn't seem to realize just how good he can be. Unfortunately, he's too impatient to allow his skills to develop. Plus, whenever he began to feel threatened—be it in the ring or in the locker room—he would lose his head. If he could maintain focus on improving his game more so than being “the man” in TNA, it might be he and I fighting over the NWA World title. It kills me to see him waste his potential like this.

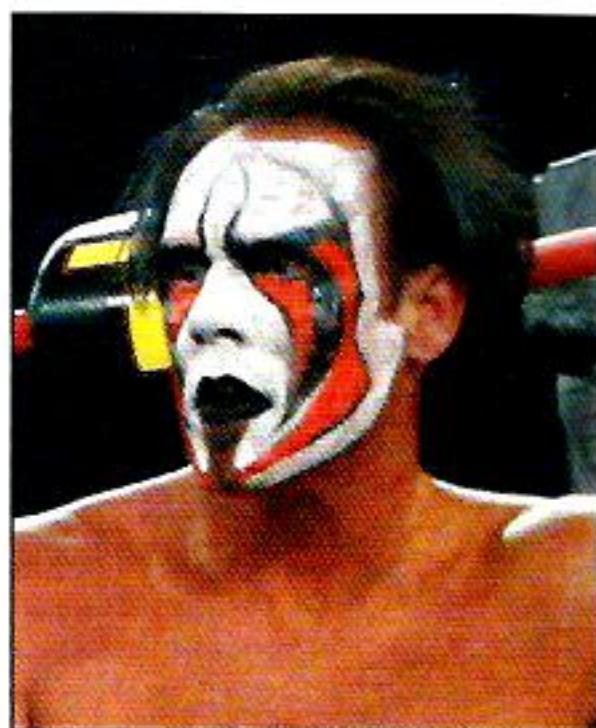
Q: What about Angle?

A: When I heard that Kurt Angle was coming to TNA, I was ecstatic. As with Christian, I had been an admirer of his career for years. To finally get the opportunity to work together was certainly a high point

of my career. He's truly carved out a niche as one of the greats of the sport. Mind you though, if he thinks he's standing in my way back to the NWA World title, he's sorely mistaken.

Q: You've spoken in the past about what you expected your role to be in TNA. Specifically, you made it very clear that you expected to be a veteran presence that will help both the company and its wealth of young talent. However, the talk now is of championships and being the top guy. What changed?

A: I think all of my previous statements still hold true. My purpose in coming out of retirement—twice—to return to TNA was and



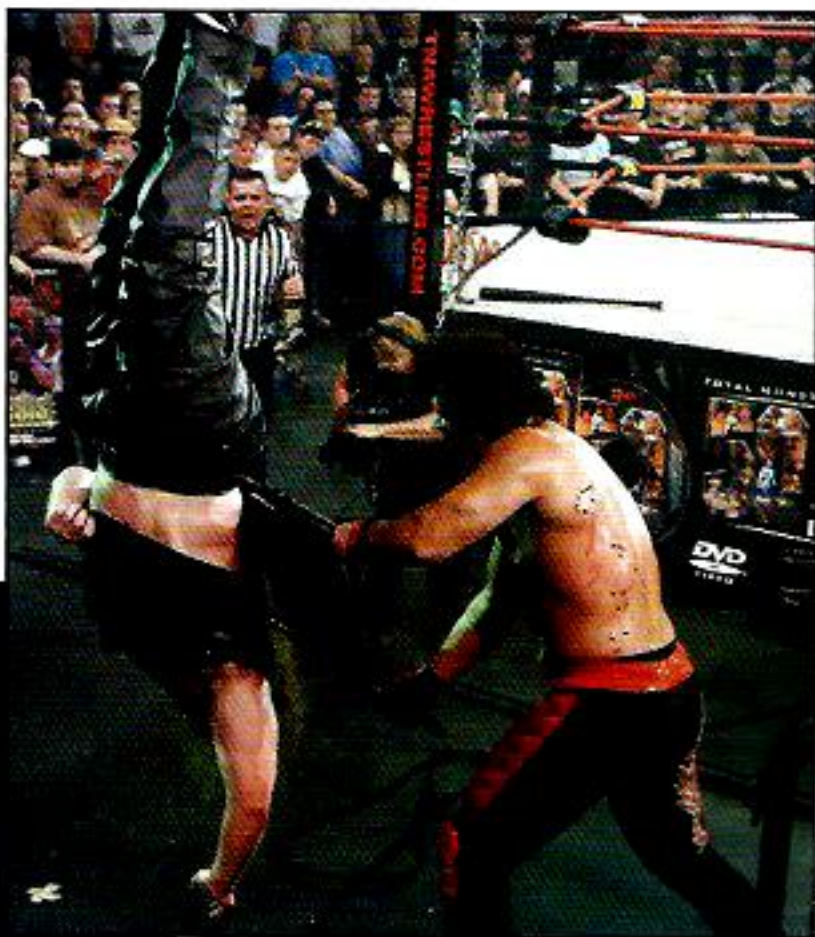
“I have never gone into anything in my career with the belief that I'm bigger than the company. Do I want to be considered the best in the business? Of course ... But I'm not going to put my personal goals ahead of the good of TNA.”

Q: Some of your critics have said that your motives should be called into question, that you're in this more to resurrect your career rather than help build TNA.

A: They obviously don't know what I'm all about. I have never gone into anything in my career with the belief that I'm bigger than the company. Do I want to be considered the best in the business? Of course—anyone who tells you otherwise isn't being straight with you. But I'm not going to put my personal goals ahead of the good of TNA.

Q: Finally, what do you believe the rest of 2007 holds for Sting?

A: That's for me to know and for you to enjoy. The one thing that's absolutely certain when it comes to “The Stinger” is that nothing is certain. I think 2007 could possibly be the most memorable year of my entire career for many reasons. □



Despite Sting's hardcore abuse of Abyss at Genesis (above), “The Stinger” greatly admires Abyss' in-ring abilities. Sting has felt the brunt of Abyss' talent (left), but thinks the “Man Monster” is in need of the right guidance—or perhaps he's just working his mind-game magic.

continues to be elevating our promotion to the top of the industry. Initially, I thought that goal could be achieved by simply showing up and letting my past carry us. Now, I think TNA would be best served by having “The Stinger” lead by example. I should be the face of TNA in 2007.



Will WWE Allow ECW To Exist As A TV-Only Product?

"I don't believe that Vince McMahon really cares what happens to ECW. He cares whether it's losing money, but he isn't committed to rebuilding the brand over the long haul."

—Frank Ingiosi

THE WWE PROMOTION machine went into full saturation mode in June 2006 when the company officially relaunched the ECW brand on a full-time basis. Following two successful pay-per-view reunions of the hardcore promotion, WWE wanted to satisfy an eager fan base that was clamoring for fresh blood and teetering ever-so-close to supporting TNA.

Acting quickly, WWE restored the ECW brand and secured an hour's worth of weekly television programming. In addition, WWE also began running lower-budget ECW house shows. For all intents and purposes, WWE's incarnation

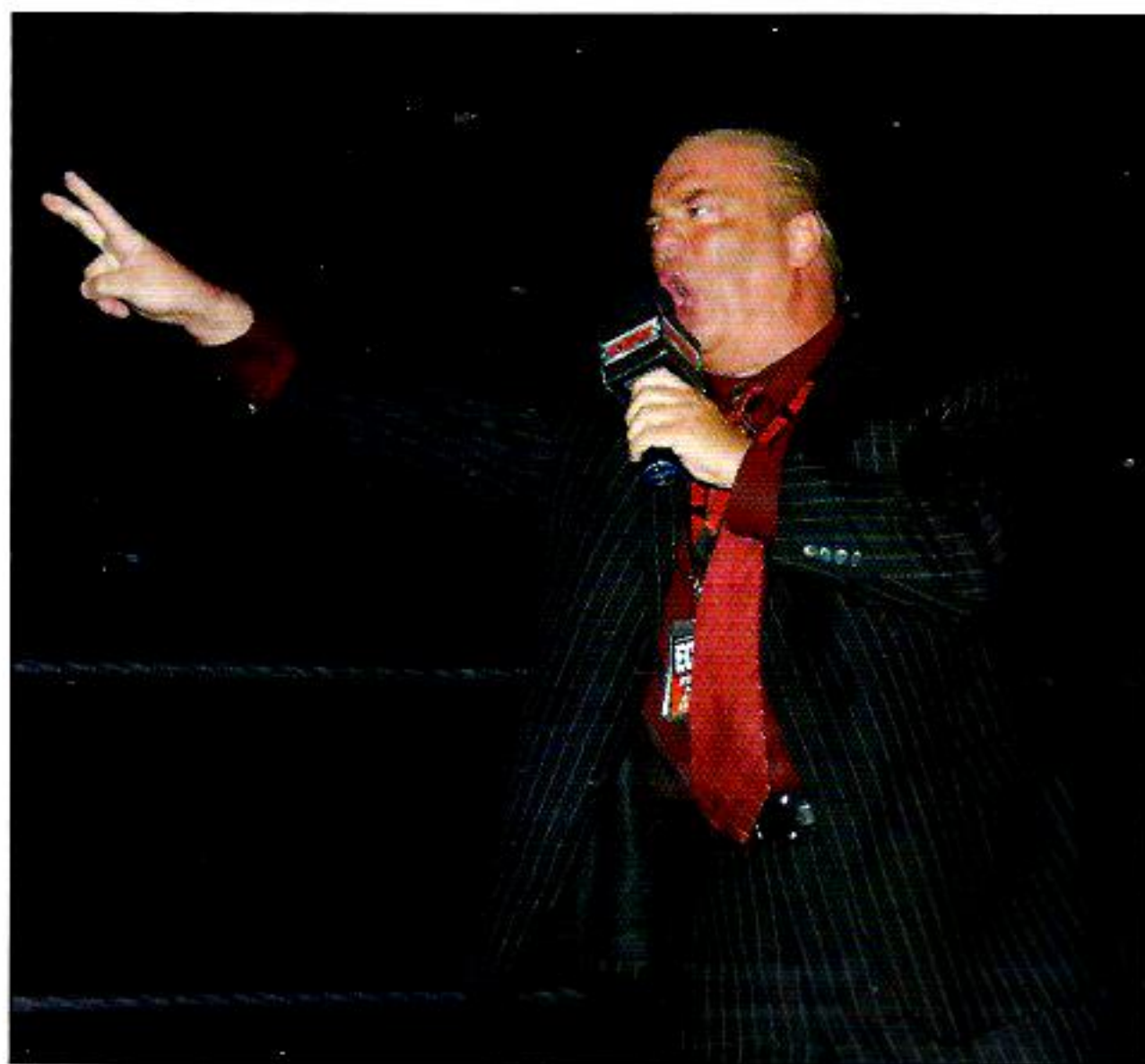
of ECW was alive, well, and on its way to becoming a viable third brand for the sports entertainment conglomerate.

However, as the brand struggled to lure fans to its live cards and television ratings fell below expectations, WWE made a business decision to suspend ECW's intimate house shows, thus forcing the brand into becoming a television-only entity, similar to TNA. For now, WWE will run Smackdown-ECW joint live events, but ECW will be the junior partner ... and it may never get another chance to establish its own identity.

Today, ECW is WWE's sole television-based program, with both the Raw and Smackdown brands maintaining steady touring schedules. Yet, in an era when exposure means so much to the success of individual wrestlers, can WWE's ECW maintain a presence in the industry without more than one hour per week on cable television?

INSIDE WRESTLING Publisher Stu Saks asked Managing Editor Lisa Rocchi, Senior Writer Frank Ingiosi, and Contributing Writer Brady Hicks to examine the viability of ECW as a TV-only brand.

STU SAKS: Gentlemen—and lady—thanks for coming in to discuss one of the most confusing and frustrating topics in all wrestling today: ECW. Specifically, I wanted to get everyone's opinions on whether ECW, which stopped running small live shows at the turn of the year, is worth WWE's trouble at this point. Does it make sense to have a brand with a television show but no house shows and only a few pay-per-views?



First WWE dropped ECW house shows. Then Vince McMahon released Paul Heyman. Either WWE is preparing to drop the hardcore brand, or it is getting ready to change ECW completely into a WWE-branded product, neither of which is something ECW fans want to see.



Dropping house shows from the ECW schedule could jeopardize the careers of many wrestlers, such as Mike Knox, who was brought in as a newcomer to WWE specifically to fill the ECW roster.

BRADY HICKS: It's not a great sign, Stu. To start out with the type of fanfare that ECW had and *then* begin to chip away at it could actually be the beginning of the end for ECW.

LISA ROCCHI: That may end up being true, Brady, but I have to respectfully disagree and point out that there's a certain promotion holding shows in sunny Florida that has done surprisingly well without running many house shows.

HICKS: True, but they did begin running live events after years of promoting their talent on television. It doesn't hurt that they had television time to build a groundswell of

interest prior to heading out on the road.

ROCCHI: Yes, but along those same lines, WWE could have brought ECW along the same gradual path. Instead, it proceeded the same way the company does with every endeavor—head-first and be damned the consequences. It seems that, in this case, the smaller promotion could have taught the big boys a few things about supply and demand.

SAKS: Of course, the promotion Lisa is alluding to is TNA, which only started running house shows about a year ago. For them, the addition of house shows was very

widely touted as a sign of viability and expansion. So, could the cancellation of live events signal the opposite for ECW? Mr. Ingiosi, we haven't heard from you yet. What are your thoughts?

FRANK INGIOSI: Actually, Stu, I don't believe that Vince McMahon really cares what happens to ECW. He cares whether it's losing money, but he isn't committed to rebuilding the brand over the long haul. I think he was willing to give it a shot as long as it made instant money for him. If ECW is failing, why keep it around? He can make more money by concentrating on Raw and Smackdown.

SAKS: So you never believed it was about rebuilding the ECW brand?

INGIOSI: Sadly, no, Stu, which is why I'm not shocked that the company is now scaling back a bit on the brand by eliminating house shows. WWE struck while the iron was hot, made all it could off the ECW name, and now seems poised to let the brand languish in mediocrity without putting much effort into it. Actually, anything the company brings in now is just a bonus.

SAKS: That's an interesting perspective, Frank. Still, does it even make sense at this point for WWE to continue with ECW, even at the pace it's going? Let's start with you, Brady.

HICKS: I don't see why it's a problem, Stu. Even when ECW was at the peak of its popularity, it was a niche product. Sure, by not having live events, WWE is forfeiting a chance at gaining greater exposure. Then again, those fans who haven't warmed up to ECW by now probably never will.

ROCCHI: I tend to agree with

WWE stopped running the house shows which, by many accounts, were barely drawing crowds and featuring wrestlers that many casual fans couldn't pick out of a lineup.

SAKS: Well, if that's the case, why not just allow ECW to act as something of a high-level developmental territory for WWE? In essence, it could be to WWE what Triple-A minor-league baseball is to the major leagues.

ROCCHI: I really don't have a problem if the brand is going to feature young, up-and-coming talent, but it still doesn't seem as if it would be worthwhile for the brand to tour. For example, OVW and Deep South Wrestling do not have much of a traveling schedule. It's fine if ECW exists to build new talent, but touring would just seem pointless. Stick to TV and give the new guys some face time.

HICKS: That's not a bad idea, although as of today ECW's ratings have not been as impressive as they were in the beginning. Sure, a Tuesday night slot on the Sci Fi Channel isn't the most desirable of spots, but if ECW only focuses on television it may prove to be a surprisingly daunting task.

SAKS: Well, if we're of the opinion—for various reasons—that ECW doesn't need to tour right now, yet a purely television-only brand on an obscure cable channel isn't a great way to grow the product, what should WWE do with ECW? Once more around the horn. Lisa?

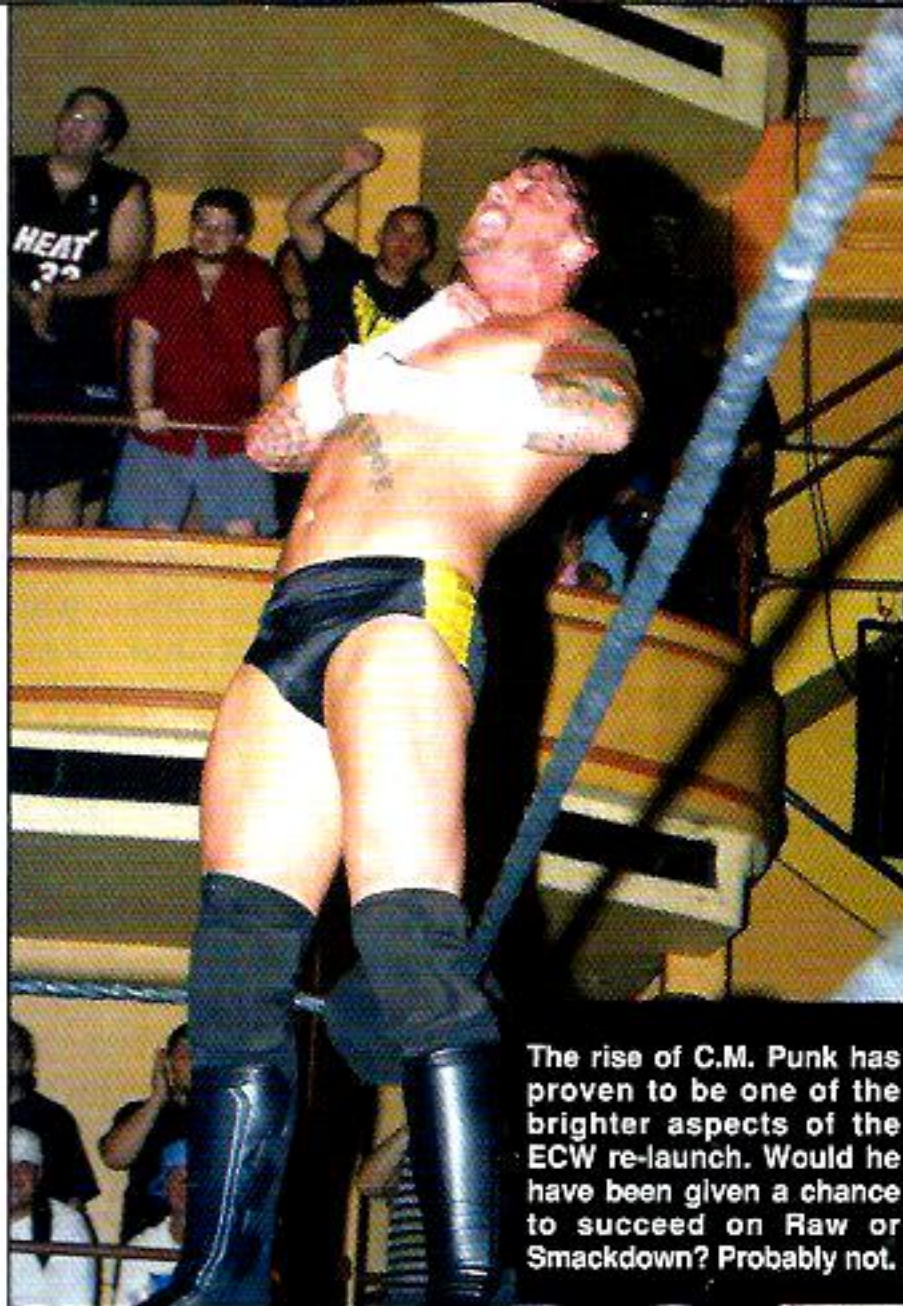
ROCCHI: Shy of a WCW-style "re-boot" of yesteryear, I think WWE should pick an identity for ECW and go with it.

With house shows apparently a thing of the past, and life on the Sci Fi Channel its best option, I think ECW should become a *Heat*- or *Velocity*-type program and showcase up-and-coming wrestlers as well as those who don't see the light of day on *Raw* or *Smackdown*.

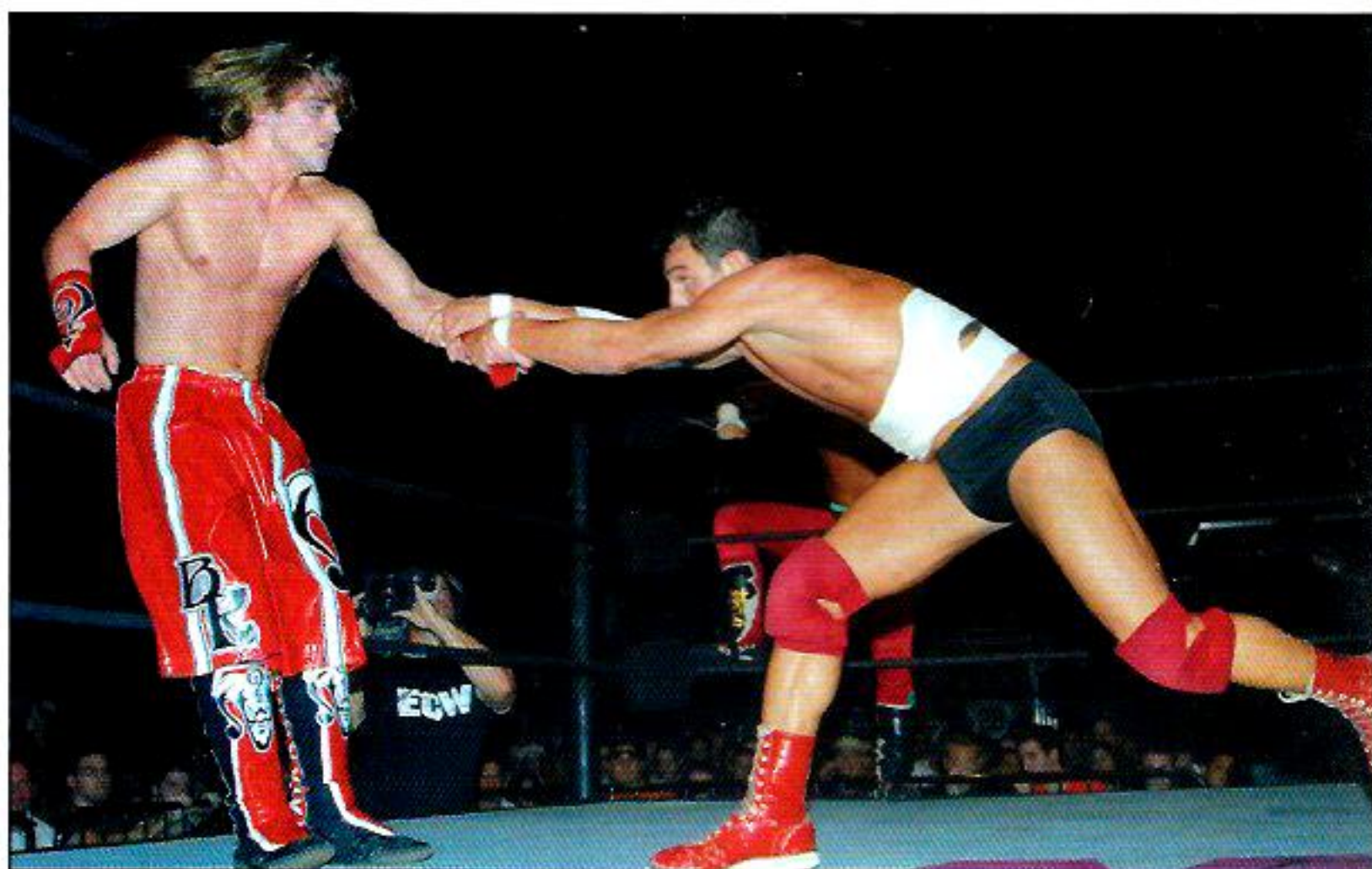
HICKS: ECW may survive for a little while as solely a television brand. However, in the long run, I think WWE—and fans—will lose enough interest to make it more of a burden than a benefit.

INGIOSI: I agree with Brady. If I had to guess, I'd say ECW doesn't see the end of 2007. Vince

McMahon is not one to be made to look ridiculous, and the ECW experiment could end up doing just that if he's not careful. □

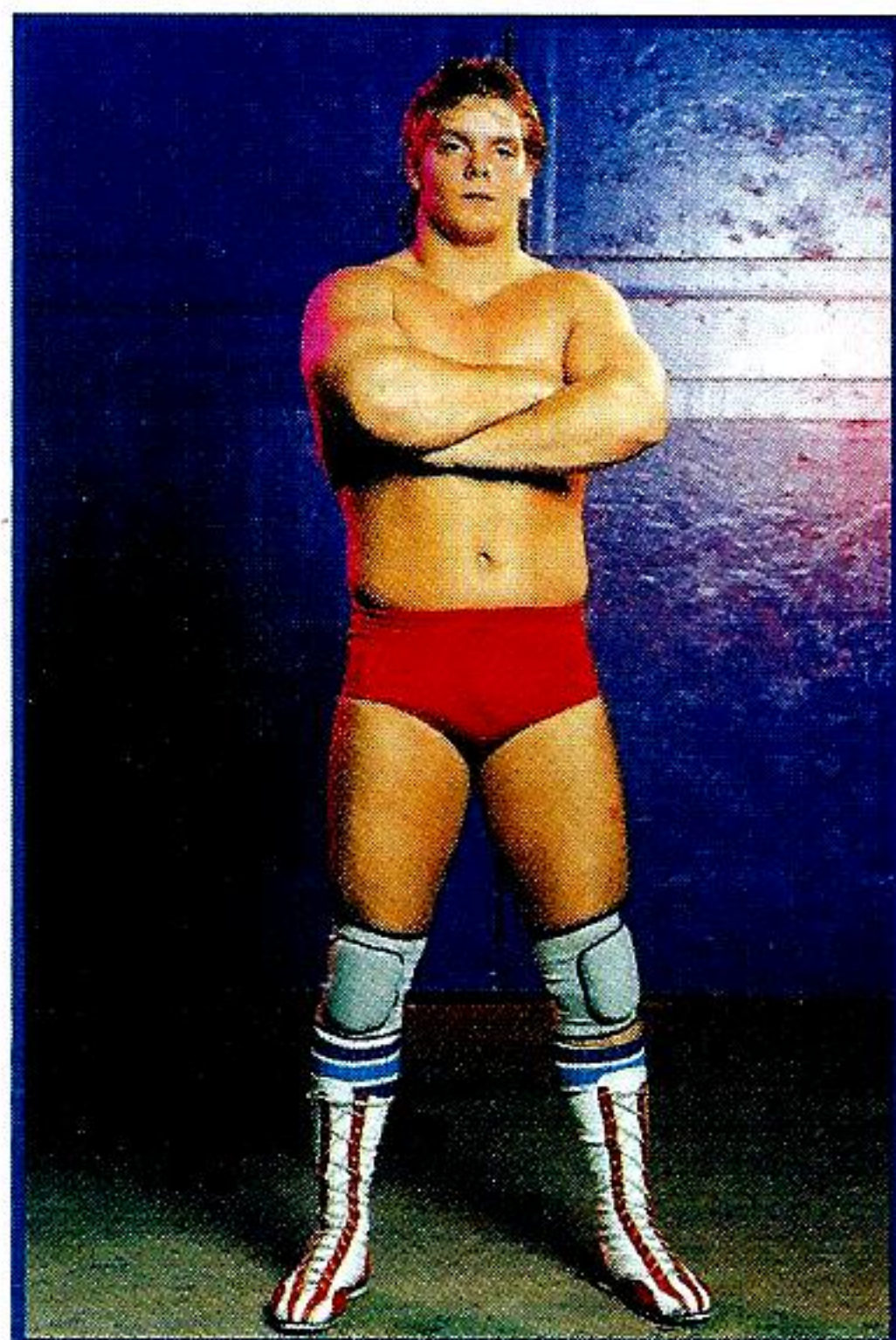


The rise of C.M. Punk has proven to be one of the brighter aspects of the ECW re-launch. Would he have been given a chance to succeed on *Raw* or *Smackdown*? Probably not.



With no tag team title, women's title, or cruiserweight title, ECW is already a limited promotion. Choosing to constrain the brand even further by offering only weekly programming and twice-a-year PPVs will cause major competition within the promotion for face time. The F.B.I. may be among those who lose out.

wrestling timeline



NOVEMBER 29, 1985:

While training in Stu Hart's infamous "Dungeon," Benoit makes his in-ring debut. His career begins with a victory when he teams with Rick Patterson in a tag team match that saw the duo beat Karl Moffat and Mike Hammer.

JUNE 16, 1992:

In his first, and largely unmemorable, stint in World Championship Wrestling, Benoit teams with fellow Canadian Beef Wellington in a loss to Brian Pillman and Japanese archrival Jushin Liger.

NOVEMBER 5, 1994:

With the "Pegasus" gimmick behind him, Benoit earns the nickname "Canadian Crippler" after breaking Sabu's neck during a match shortly after signing with ECW.

MAY 21, 1967:

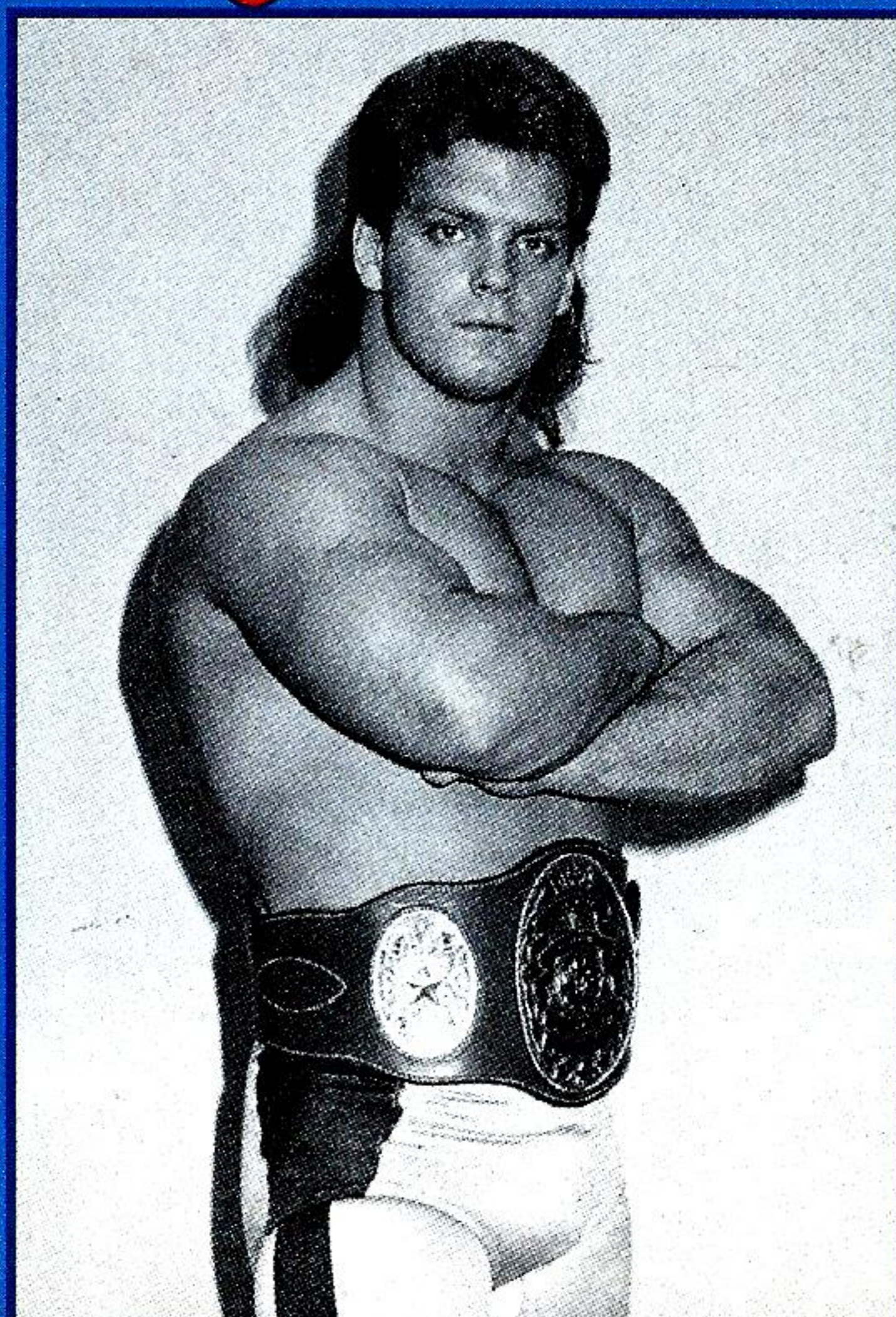
Christopher Michael Benoit is born in the hub of French Canada—Montreal, Quebec. His family would later move across the country, settling down in Edmonton, Alberta, when Chris was 12 years old.

MARCH 19, 1988:

Following in the footsteps of idols Bret Hart and Dynamite Kid, Benoit captures his first singles title—the British Commonwealth mid-heavyweight championship—when he defeats Gama Singh.

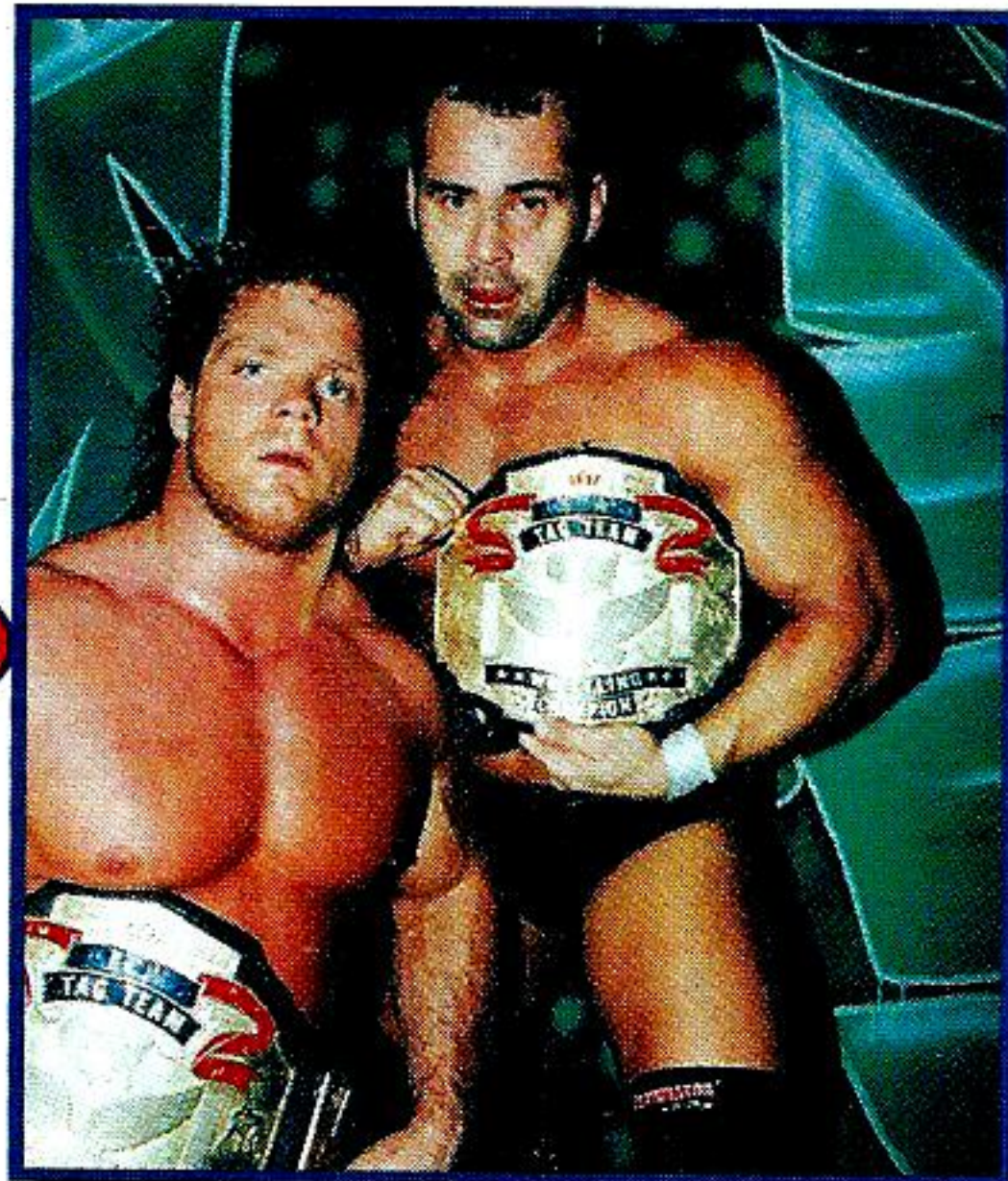
APRIL 16, 1994:

Benoit returns to the Orient to win New Japan's prestigious Super J Cup Tournament. He defeats legends Black Tiger, Gedo, and Great Sasuke to emerge victorious.



Chris Benoit

INSIDE WRESTLING journeys back in time to examine the career of a superstar who has left a major imprint on the sport



FEBRUARY 25, 1995:

Benoit captures ECW championship gold when he teams with Dean Malenko to defeat Sabu and The Tazmaniac (Tazz) for the ECW tag team title.

OCTOBER 29, 1995:

After returning to WCW, Benoit accepts membership into the famed Four Horsemen stable with Ric Flair, Brian Pillman, and Arn Anderson.

MARCH 14, 1999:

Teaming again with Malenko, Benoit captures the WCW World tag team championship for the first of three times in his career.

JUNE 1, 1995:

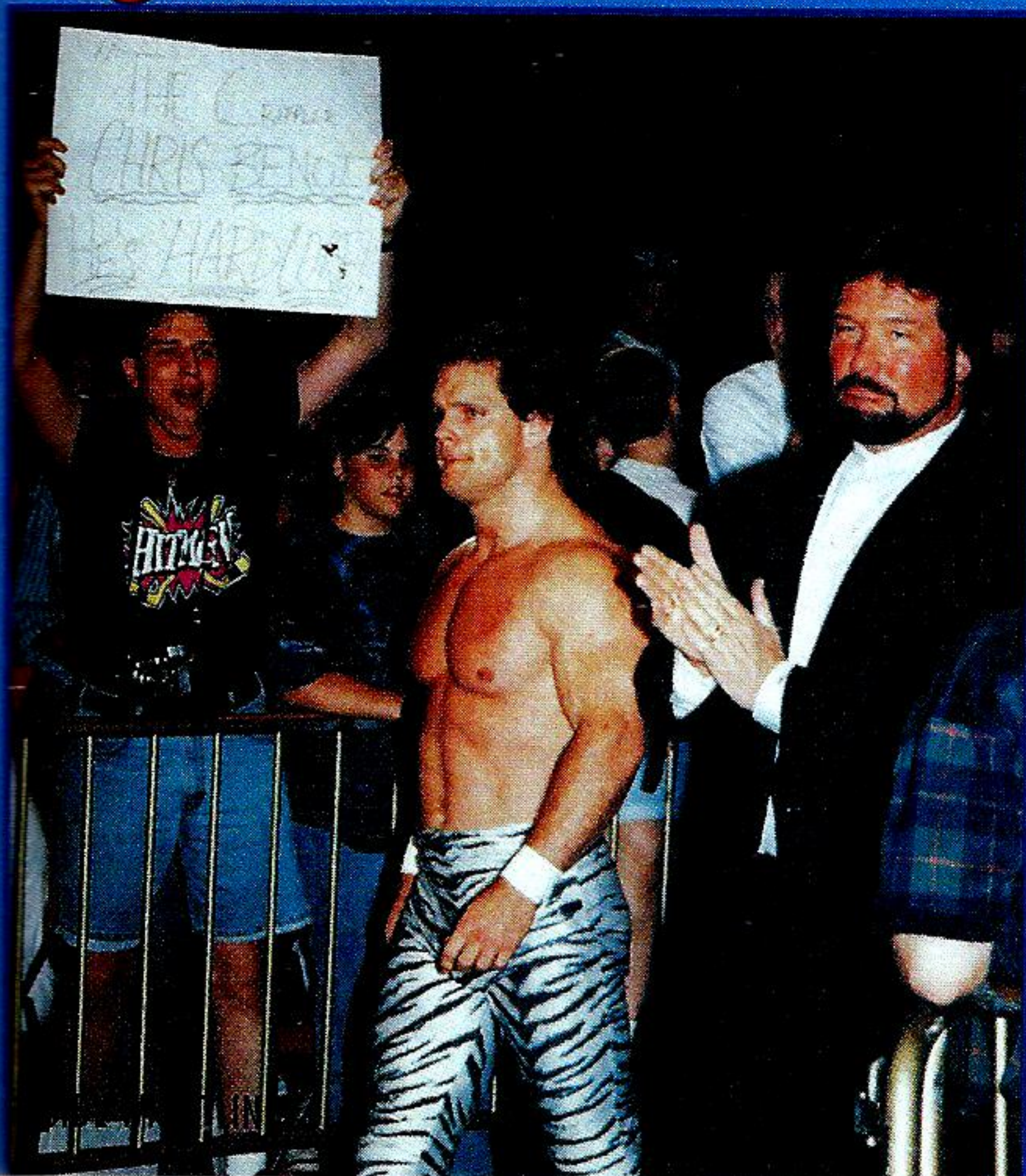
Benoit joins the WWF for the first time, as a member of the Million-Dollar Corporation. Having a junior heavyweight enter the WWF as a rulebreaker, complete with a top manager, was a novel concept in the mid-1990s. Benoit, however, left after winning a few preliminary matches.

JULY 13, 1997:

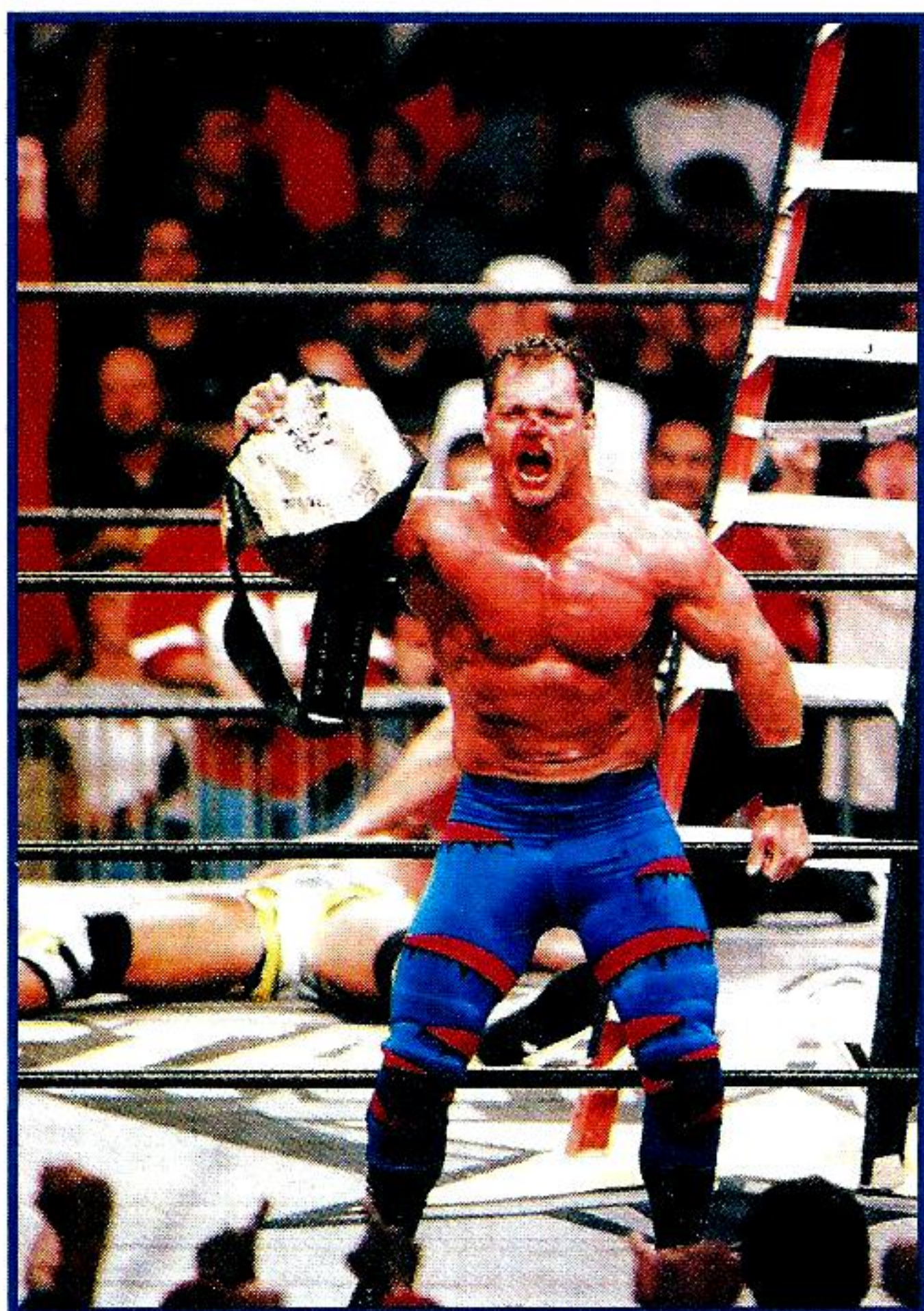
While engaged in a long and vicious feud that crossed over from his on-camera to personal life, Benoit defeats Kevin Sullivan in a retirement match. Their feud is fueled by a relationship between Benoit and Sullivan's wife, Woman.

JUNE 14, 1998:

Booker T defeats Benoit in what was the eighth and deciding match of their best-of-seven series at the Great American Bash. Benoit refused victory in the seventh match after Bret Hart interfered on his behalf.



wrestling timeline



DECEMBER 20, 1999:

After dropping the TV title back to Steiner, Benoit reclaims the U.S. championship by defeating Jeff Jarrett in a ladder match at Starrcade 1999.

JANUARY 31, 2000:

Benoit—along with fellow defectors Perry Saturn, Dean Malenko, and Eddie Guerrero—make a surprise appearance on WWF's Raw only two weeks after leaving the rapidly fading WCW.

SEPTEMBER 13, 1999:

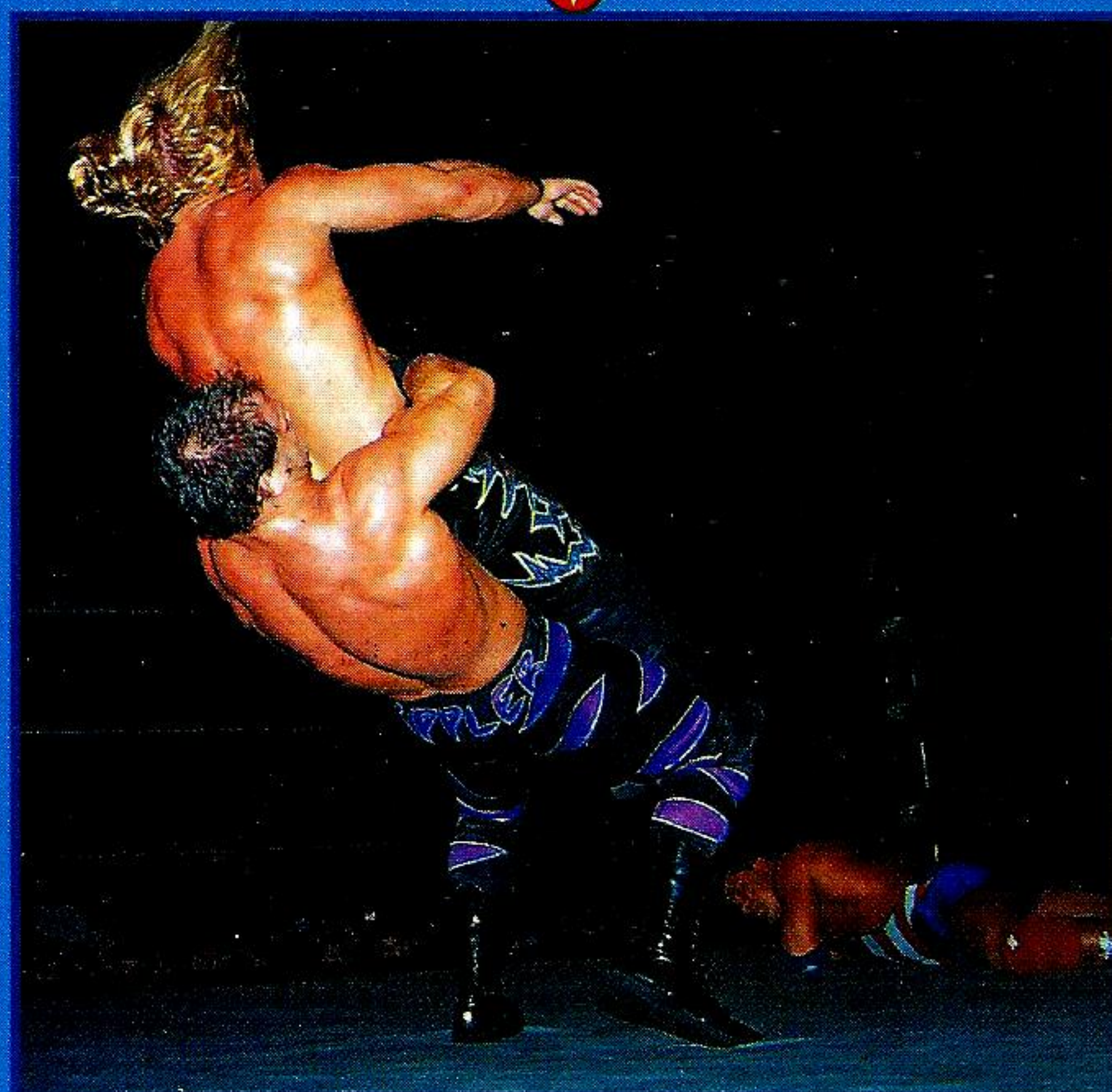
Taking something of a step back, Benoit wins the TV title from Rick Steiner during "The Crippler's" time as a member of The Revolution. This would signal the beginning of a strange and tumultuous period for Benoit.

JANUARY 16, 2000:

What should have been the crowning moment of his career winds up being one of Benoit's lowest moments when he defeats Sid Vicious for the WCW World championship. He forfeits the title the next day and leaves the promotion after a lengthy battle over the direction of his career in WCW.

APRIL 2, 2000:

It doesn't take the "Rabid Wolverine" long to capture a title in the WWF. Benoit wins the Intercontinental championship in a three-way match with Chris Jericho and Kurt Angle at WrestleMania XVI.





JULY 23, 2000:

Benoit gets his first shot at the WWF World title, but falls to The Rock in a well-fought contest at Fully Loaded, despite having the "Great One" on the defensive with submission holds for much of the match.

APRIL 29, 2001:

Gaining a modicum of revenge, Benoit defeats Angle in a 30-minute "Ironman" submission match at the WWF's Backlash pay-per-view. Unfortunately for Benoit, Angle would win their next meeting at Judgment Day to gain the final advantage.

MAY 27, 2002:

Benoit returns to the newly christened WWE after recovering from neck surgery and sides with Eddie Guerrero, one of the top rulebreakers of the Raw brand at the time.

APRIL 1, 2001:

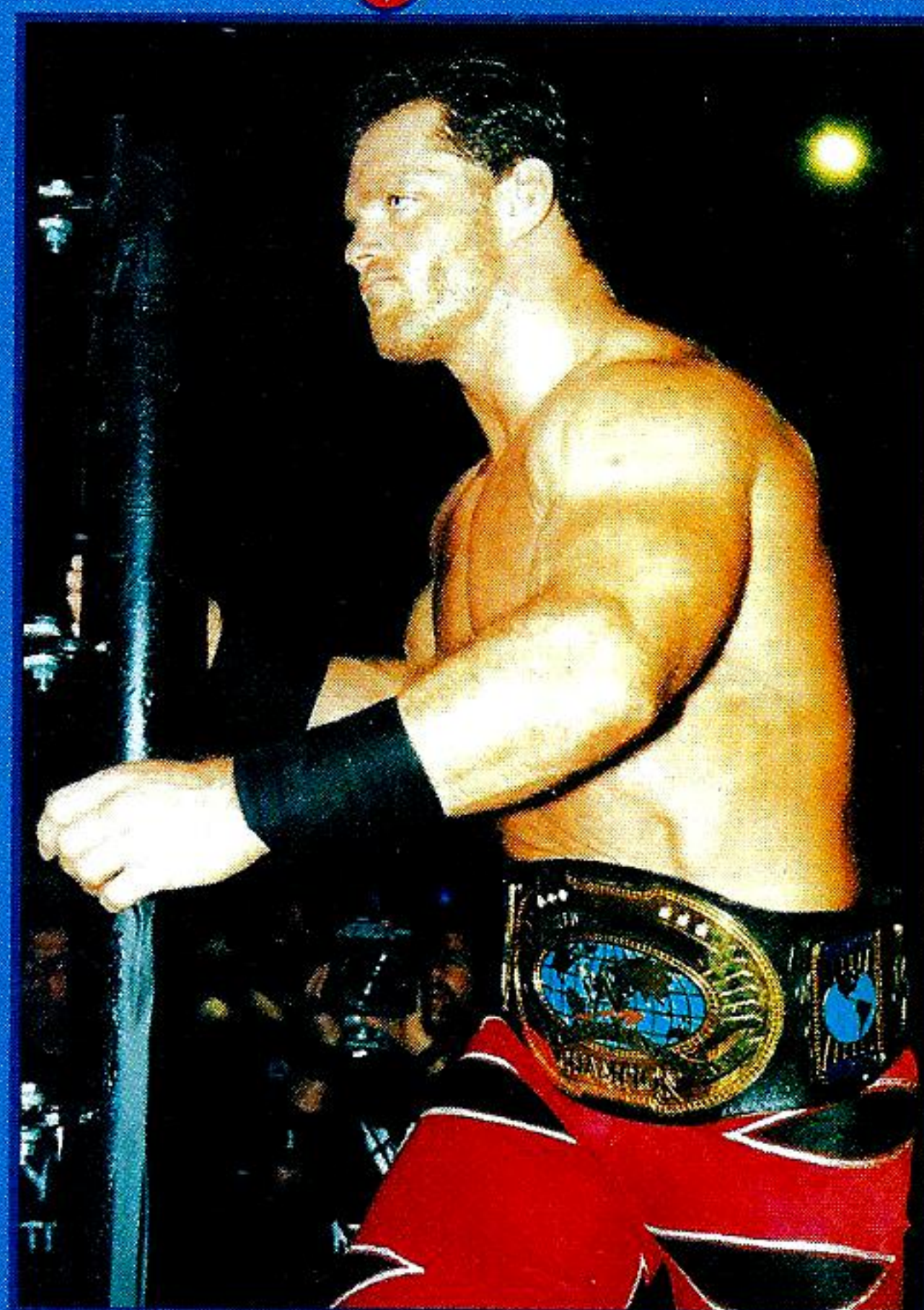
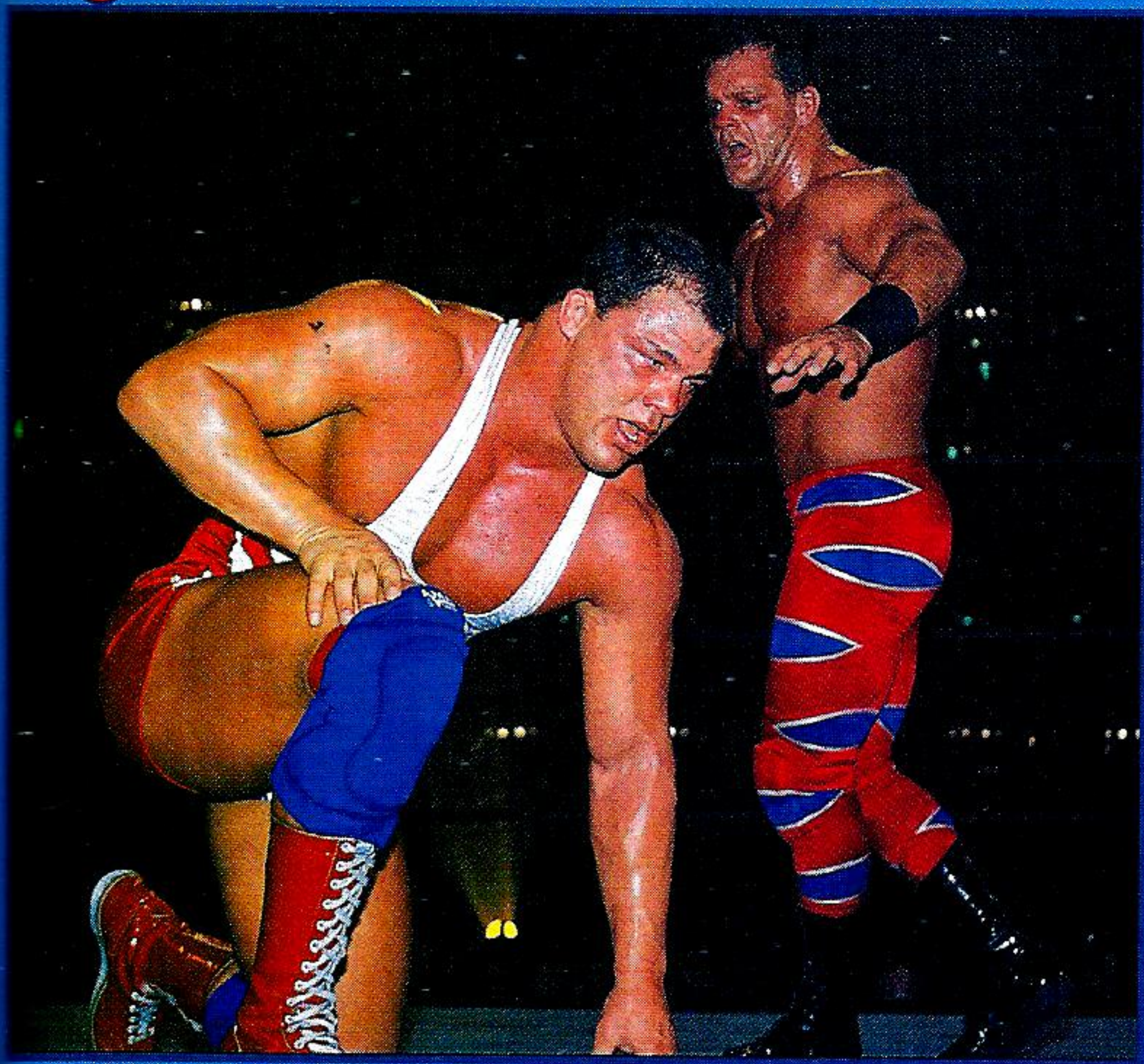
Two of the all-time greatest technical wrestlers collided when Benoit squared off against Kurt Angle at WrestleMania X-7 in Houston, Texas. Angle got the best of Benoit that evening, but their epic feud was just starting to heat up.

MAY 20, 2001:

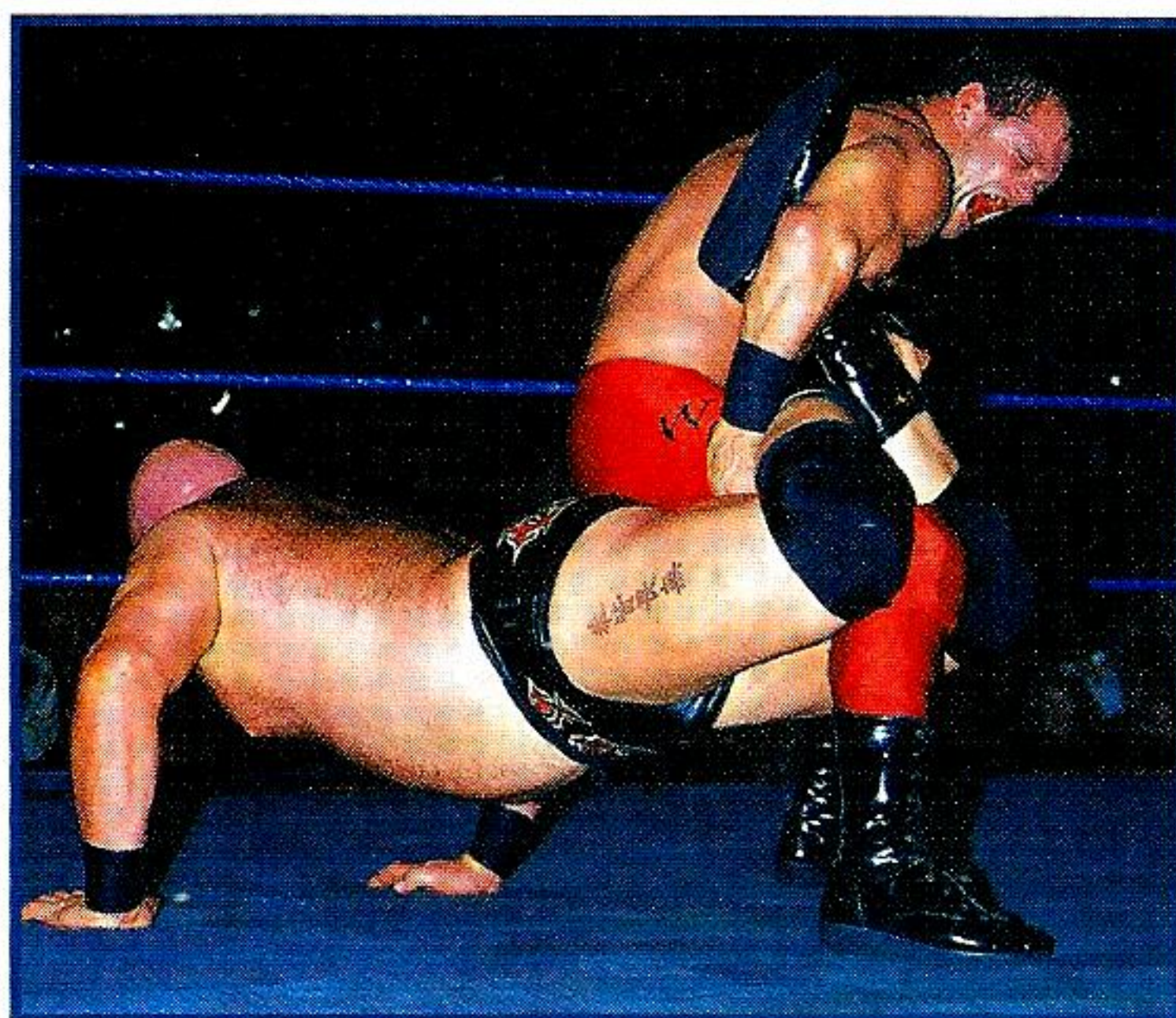
The unlikely pairing of Chris Jericho and Benoit leads to "The Crippler" capturing his first WWF World tag team championship when the duo defeats Steve Austin and Triple-H.

JULY 29, 2002:

Benoit reclaims the Intercontinental title—his fourth reign—by defeating Rob Van Dam on Raw. Three days later, Benoit would officially jump to Smackdown with the title.



wrestling timeline



SEPTEMBER 22, 2002:

Old rivalries die hard as Benoit once again faces rival Kurt Angle—after the two could not coexist as tag partners—at WWE's Unforgiven pay-per-view. The match is widely acclaimed to be the best in their series.



OCTOBER 19, 2003:

As a tribute to his fallen trainer, Stu Hart, Benoit defeats A-Train at No Mercy in the culmination of their brief feud by employing the sharpshooter, Bret Hart's famous finishing hold.



JANUARY 25, 2004:

After being forced to be the number-one entrant, Benoit outlasts 29 other competitors to win the 2004 Royal Rumble, thus securing a world title shot at WrestleMania XX.

OCTOBER 20, 2002:

Benoit and Angle put aside their differences to capture the Smackdown World tag team championship, defeating Edge and Rey Mysterio Jr. at No Mercy.

JULY 27, 2003:

Former friend and partner Rhyno costs Benoit his first WWE U.S. championship by interfering in his match against then-champion Eddie Guerrero. Benoit and Rhyno were snarled in a vicious and personal feud.

DECEMBER 4, 2003:

Benoit once again flirts with history, defeating Cena on Smackdown—thanks to The Big Show's interference—and gaining a shot at Brock Lesnar's Smackdown World championship. Lesnar, however, would retain the title by defeating Benoit later that evening.





JANUARY 26, 2004:

In a major surprise, Benoit—a Smackdown wrestler at this point—appears on Raw to announce that he will challenge that brand's world champion at WrestleMania XX.

APRIL 18, 2004:

Proving he is no fluke, Benoit once again defeats Michaels and Triple-H in a three-way match at Backlash, retaining the Raw World title.

AUGUST 15, 2004:

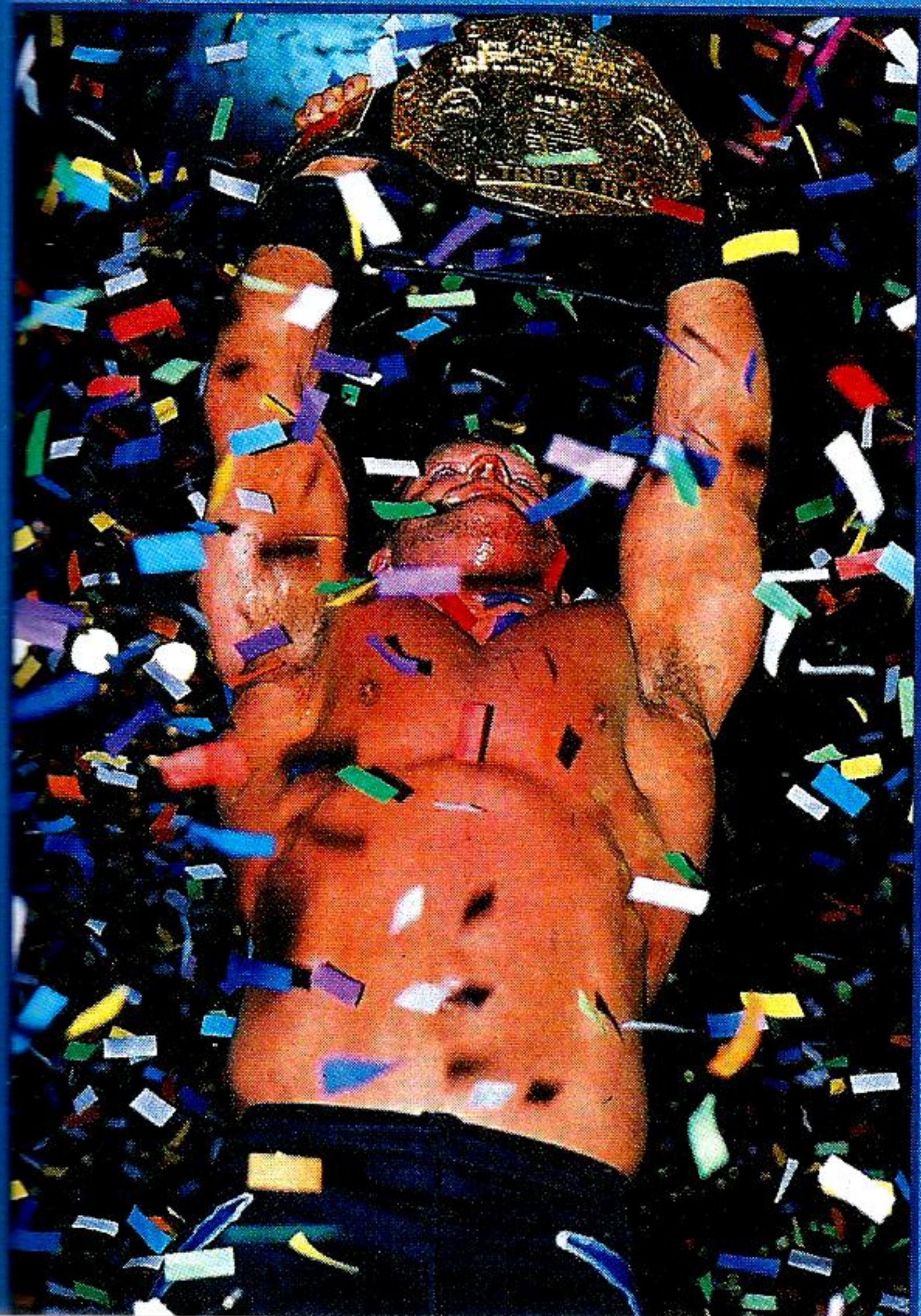
Benoit's dream run as Raw World champion ends at SummerSlam 2004 when Randy Orton defeated him to become the youngest WWE world champion in the promotion's history.

MARCH 14, 2004:

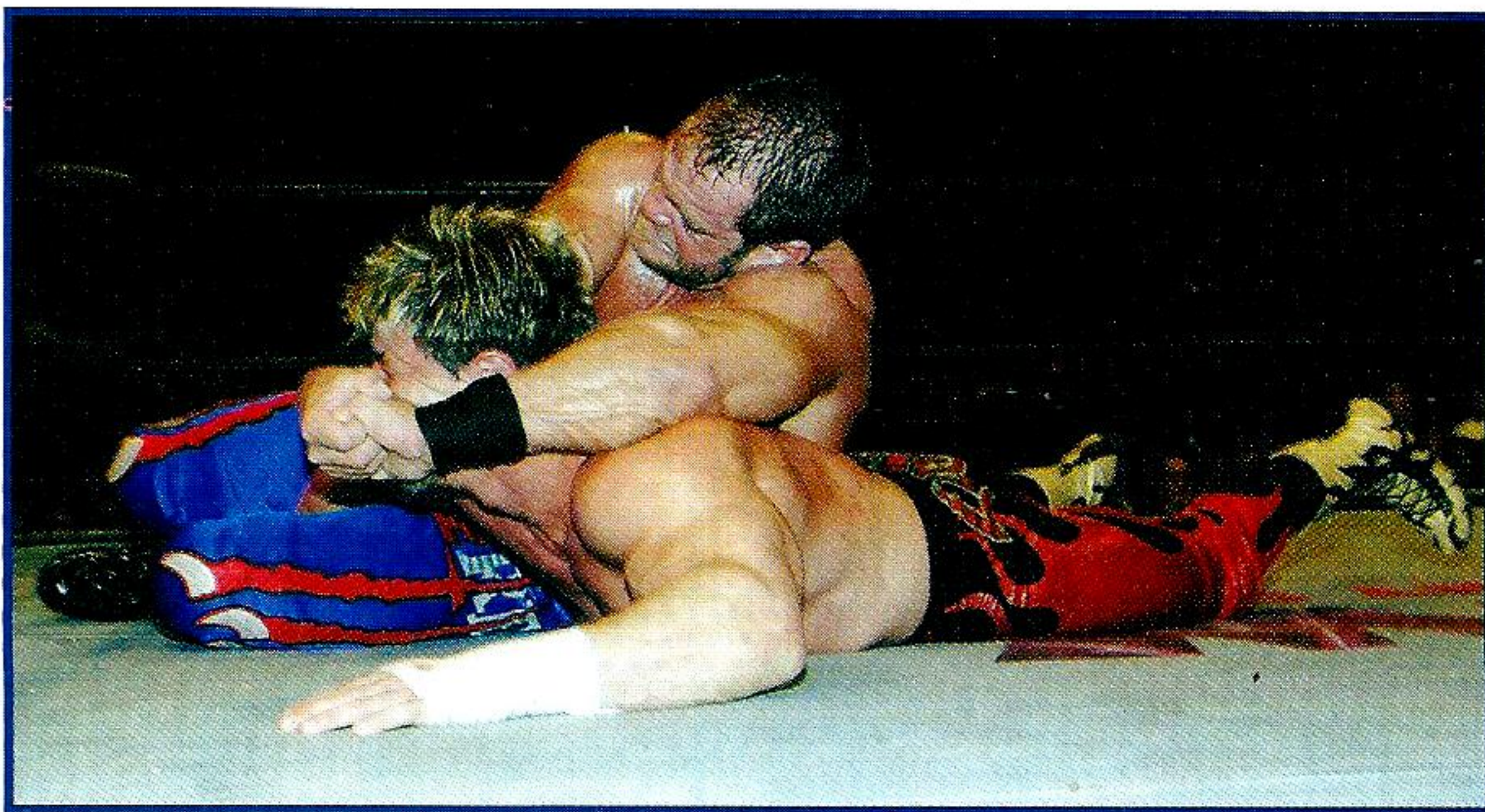
Benoit finally reaches the pinnacle of WWE when he captures the Raw World title in front of a packed house at Madison Square Garden during WrestleMania XX. He defeats defending champ Triple-H and Shawn Michaels in a three-way bout.

APRIL 19, 2004:

Teaming with Edge, Benoit captures the Raw World tag team title by defeating Evolution members Ric Flair and Batista.



wrestling timeline



JUNE 12, 2005:

At ECW One Night Stand I, Benoit defeats Eddie Guerrero in a match that many industry analysts believe stole the show.

NOVEMBER 25, 2005:

Revisiting one of the greatest rivalries in WCW history, Benoit and Booker T once again agree to a best-of-seven series, this time with the U.S. championship on the line. Injuries to Booker would make these contests pale in comparison to past battles.

OCTOBER 19, 2004:

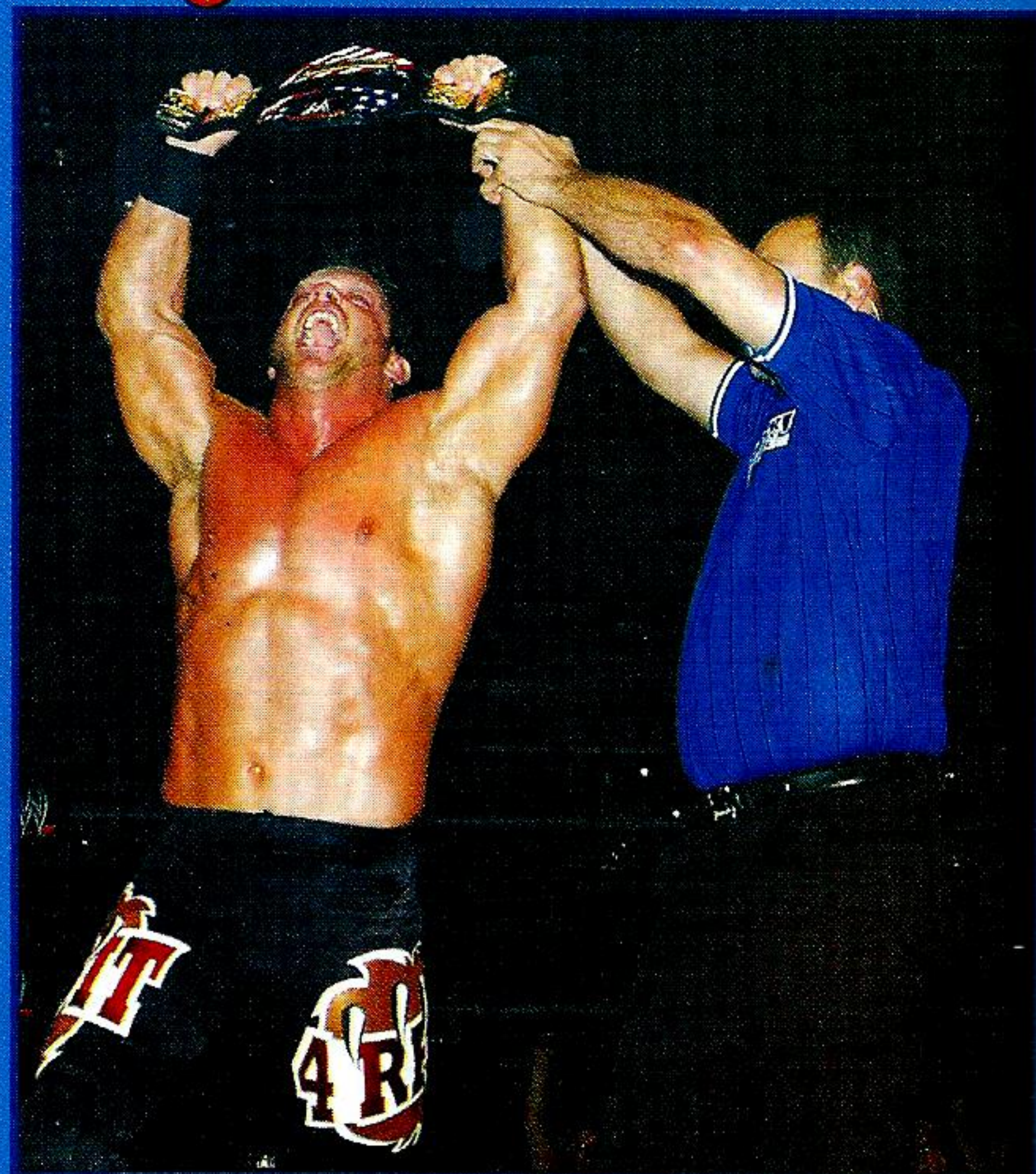
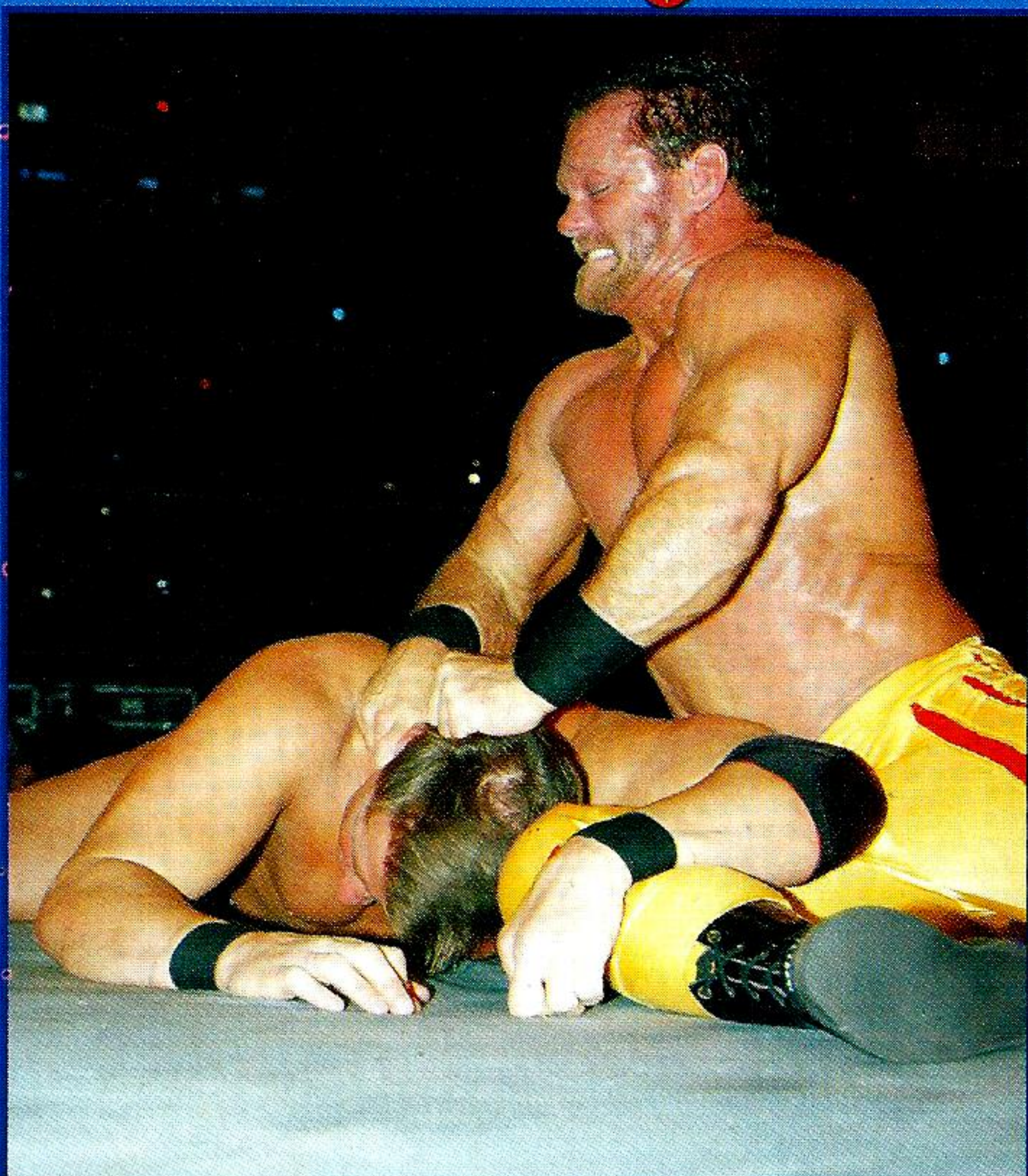
Returning to the tag ranks, Benoit once again teams with Edge and captures the Raw World tag team title at the inaugural Taboo Tuesday pay-per-view.

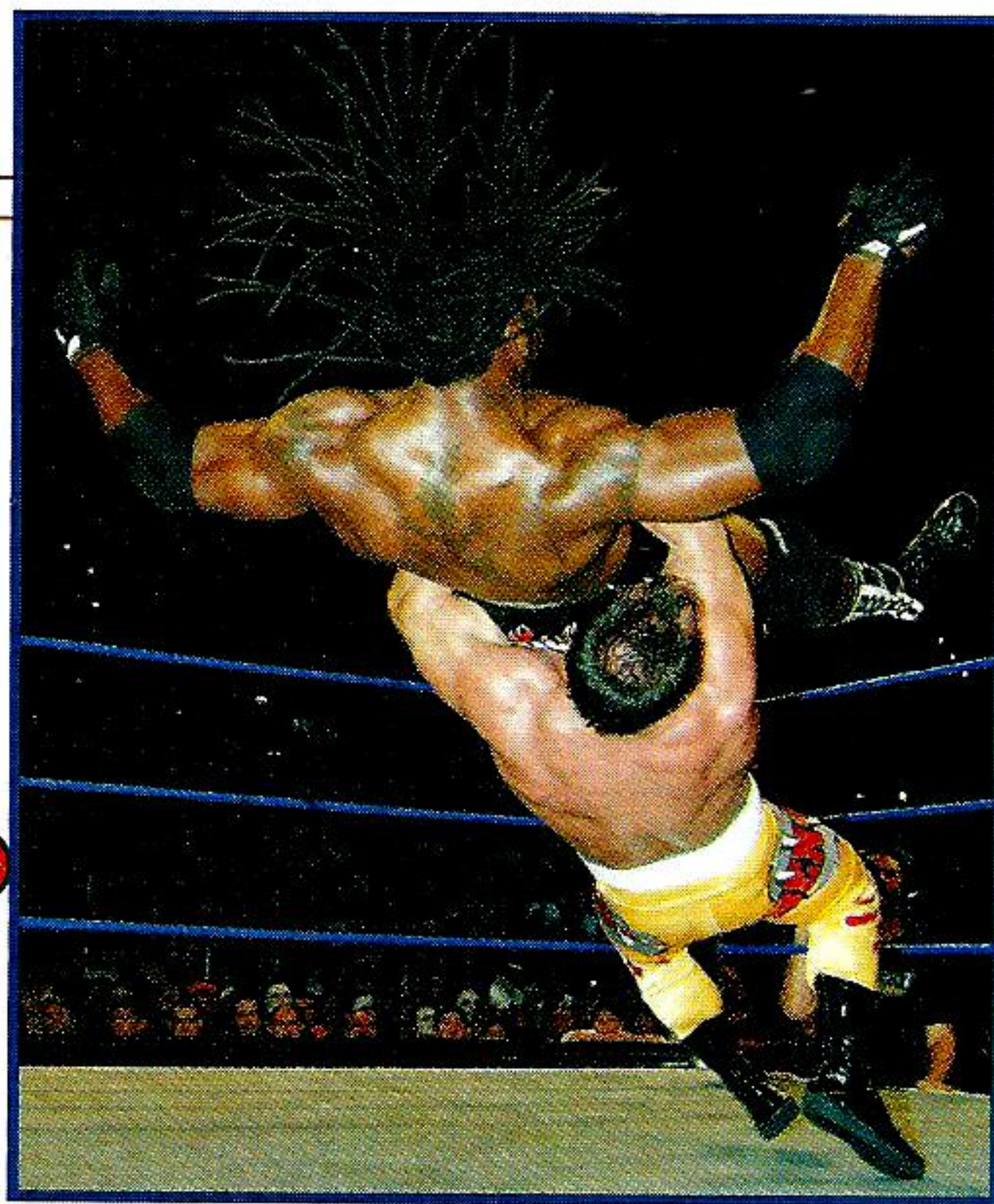
JUNE 9, 2005:

The "Rabid Wolverine" returns to Smackdown during the annual draft lottery and battles John Bradshaw Layfield in his first match back with the blue brand.

AUGUST 21, 2005:

Beginning what would be a decisively one-sided feud, Benoit easily defeats Orlando Jordan in 25 seconds to capture his third U.S. championship in the opening match at SummerSlam 2005.





FEBRUARY 19, 2006:

At No Way Out, Benoit captures his fourth U.S. title by finally defeating Booker T, who had been sidelined by an injury and had used substitutes to fend off the "Rabid Wolverine."

MAY 21, 2006:

Showing his toughness, Benoit went toe-to-toe with the returning Finlay in a brilliant yet brutal match at Judgment Day 2006. This would be one of Benoit's final great performances before nagging injuries force him to take a hiatus.

OCTOBER 13, 2006:

Always the fast starter, Benoit's triumphant return to the Smackdown brand is complete as he defeats Ken Kennedy to capture the U.S. championship for the fifth time.

APRIL 1, 2006:

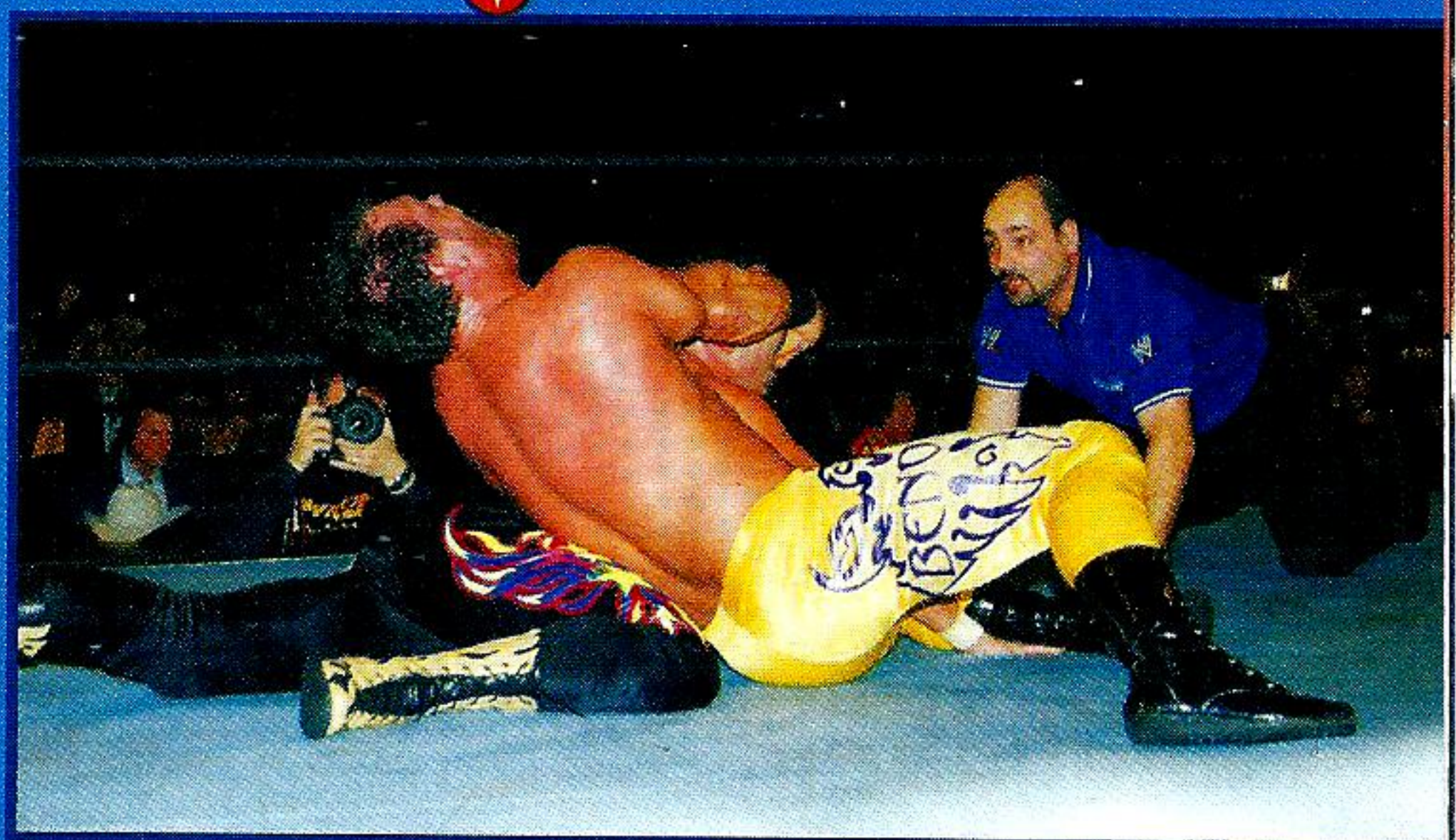
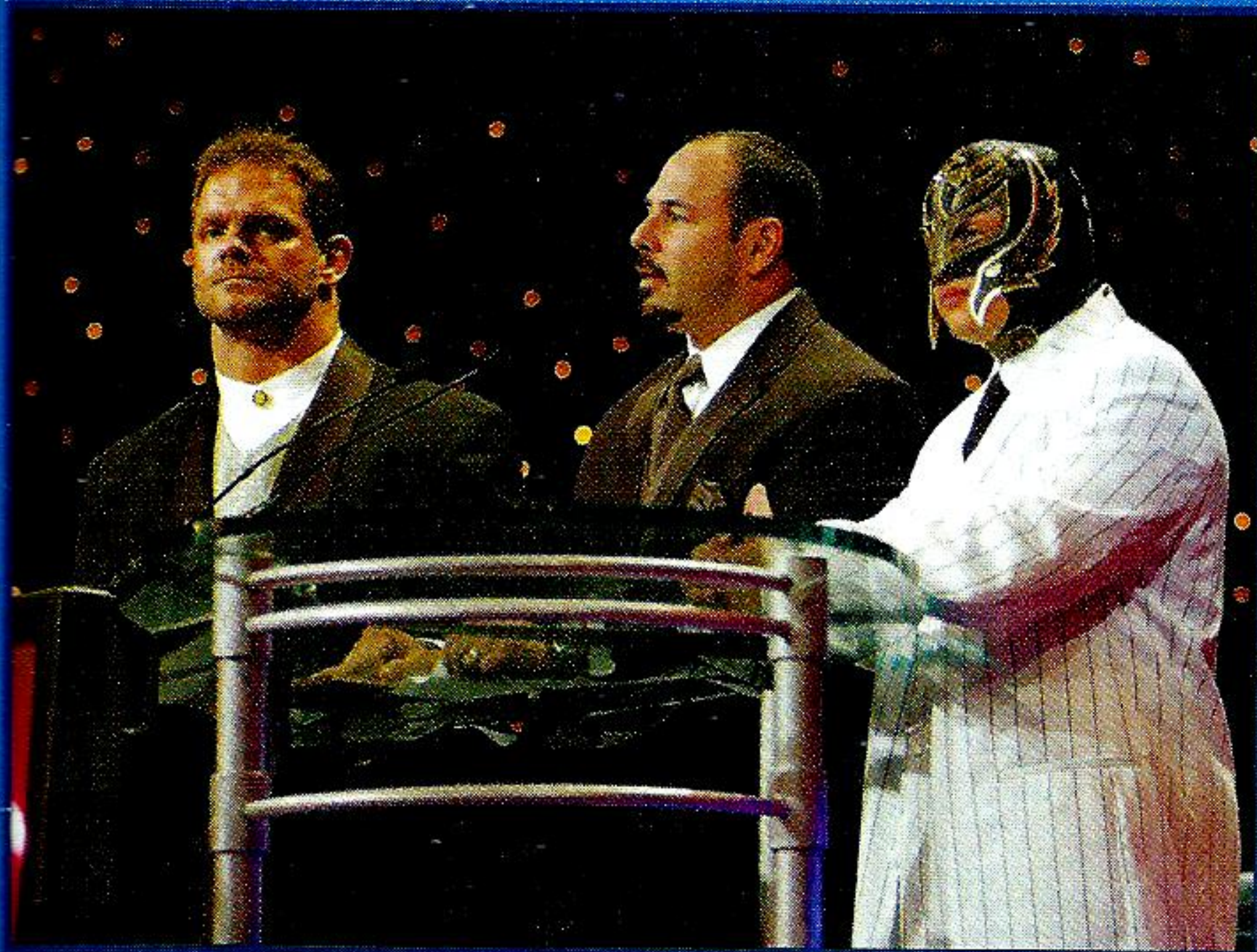
Benoit, along with Rey Mysterio Jr. and Chavo Guerrero Jr., induct the beloved Eddie Guerrero into the WWE Hall of Fame during ceremonies held the weekend of WrestleMania 22.

OCTOBER 8, 2006:

In a surprise match that was previously unannounced by WWE, Benoit returns to the promotion at Smackdown's No Mercy, defeating William Regal by submission.

NOVEMBER 26, 2006:

Benoit retains the U.S. title against Chavo Guerrero Jr. at Survivor Series. Benoit was disappointed that Guerrero had been psychologically tormenting and brutally pummeling Rey Mysterio Jr. during his absence.



WOW
Check out this shot!

You don't believe that wrestling can be an ugly, brutal business? Just take a look at Kurt Angle's bloody and contorted face during this match at Genesis. Samoa Joe added more *umph* to the blow by holding on to the top rope as he delivered a kick to the side of Angle's head. Looking at this photo, it's hard to believe that Angle rallied in this match and forced Joe to submit. The following month, Joe defeated Angle at Turning Point.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

FOR PERIOD ENDED DECEMBER 23, 2006

Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue. The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

ALL JAPAN INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: VACANT
(Most recently held by Jamal & Taiyo Kea)

ALL JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: SHUJI KONDO
(October 22, 2005; from Taka Michinoku; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: MINORU SUZUKI
(September 3, 2006; from Taiyo Kea; Sapporo, Japan)

AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: RIC CONVERSE
(June 14, 2006; from Takao Omori; Indianapolis, IN)

BORDER CITY WRESTLING CAN-AM HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: ABYSS
(September 15, 2005; beat Bobby Roode; Windsor, Ontario)

BORDER CITY WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JIMMY JACOBS & PHIL ATLAS
(July 22, 2005; from Danny Daniels & N8 Mattson; Windsor, Ontario)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: FREAK NASTTY
(January 28, 2006; from Fred Sampson; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: BRYAN LOGAN
(October 7, 2006; from Mike Tobin; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: ANDREW RYKER & ADEN CHAMBERS
(May 13, 2006; from The Valedictorians; Newark, DE)

HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: VACANT
(Most recently held by Pepper Parks)

HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JAKE & DAVE CRIST
(October 20, 2006; from Andre Hart & Richard Phillips; Cincinnati, OH)

IWA MID-SOUTH HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: CHUCK TAYLOR
(September 30, 2006; from Toby Klein; Midlothian, IL)

IWA MID-SOUTH LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JOSH ABERCROMBIE
(January 21, 2006; beat Tyler Black; Midlothian, IL)

IWF AMERICAN CHAMPION: CHRIS STEELER
(November 17, 2006; from Travis Blake; West Paterson, NJ)

IWF HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TONY TORRES
(November 17, 2006; from Shawn Donavan; West Paterson, NJ)

IWF TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: STEVE CAMACHO & MIKE DURNIN
(September 22, 2006; from Antonio Rivera & Tony Torres; West Paterson, NJ)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: HIROSHI TANAHASHI
(July 17, 2006; title was vacant; Sapporo, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: MANABU NAKANISHI & TAKAO OMORI
(July 17, 2006; from Shiro Koshinaka & Togi Makabe; Sapporo, Japan)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KOJI KANEMOTO
(May 3, 2006; from Tiger Mask IV; Fukuoka, Japan)

NWA WORLD CHAMPION: ABYSS
(November 19, 2006; from Sting; Orlando, FL)

NWA WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: HOMICIDE & HERNANDEZ
(October 22, 2006; from A.J. Styles & Christopher Daniels; Detroit, MI)

NWA SHOCKWAVE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: BOBBY ROODE
(March 22, 2006; from Josh Daniels; Deer Park, NY)

OVW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JACOB DUNCAN
(October 27, 2006; from Chet the Jet; Louisville, KY)

OVW SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: DEUCE & DOMINO
(December 6, 2006; from Cody Runnels & Shawn Spears; Louisville, KY)

OVW TV CHAMPION: SETH SKYFIRE
(November 15, 2006; from Charles Evans; Louisville, KY)

OVW WOMEN'S CHAMPION: KATIE LEA
(November 1, 2006; from Beth Phoenix; Louisville, KY)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA CHAMPION: JOEY RYAN
(December 3, 2005; from Kevin Steen; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: EL GENERICO & QUICKSILVER
(December 2, 2006; from Super Dragon & B-Boy; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: MITSU HARU MISAWA
(December 10, 2006; from Naomichi Marufuji; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TAKASHI SUGIURA
(June 4, 2006; from KENTA; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TAKESHI MORISHIMA & MOHAMMED YONE
(December 2, 2006; from Takuma Sano & Yoshihiro Takayama in a tournament final; Tokyo, Japan)

RING OF HONOR CHAMPION: HOMICIDE
(December 23, 2006; from Bryan Danielson; New York, NY)

RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CHRISTOPHER DANIELS & MATT SYDAL
(November 25, 2006; from Claudio Castagnoli & Chris Hero; Edison, NJ)

TNA X CHAMPION: CHRISTOPHER DANIELS
(November 6, 2006; from A.J. Styles; Orlando, FL)

WWE CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION: GREGORY HELMS
(January 29, 2006; from Kid Kash; Miami, FL)

WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: JEFF HARDY
(November 13, 2006; from Johnny Nitro; Manchester, England)

WWE RAW WORLD CHAMPION: JOHN CENA
(September 17, 2006; from Edge; Toronto, Ontario)

WWE RAW WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: RANDY ORTON & EDGE
(November 13, 2006; from Ric Flair & Roddy Piper; Manchester, England)

WWE SMACKDOWN WORLD CHAMPION: BATISTA
(November 26, 2006; from King Booker; Philadelphia, PA)

WWE SMACKDOWN WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: PAUL LONDON & BRIAN KENDRICK
(May 21, 2006; M-N-M; Phoenix, AZ)

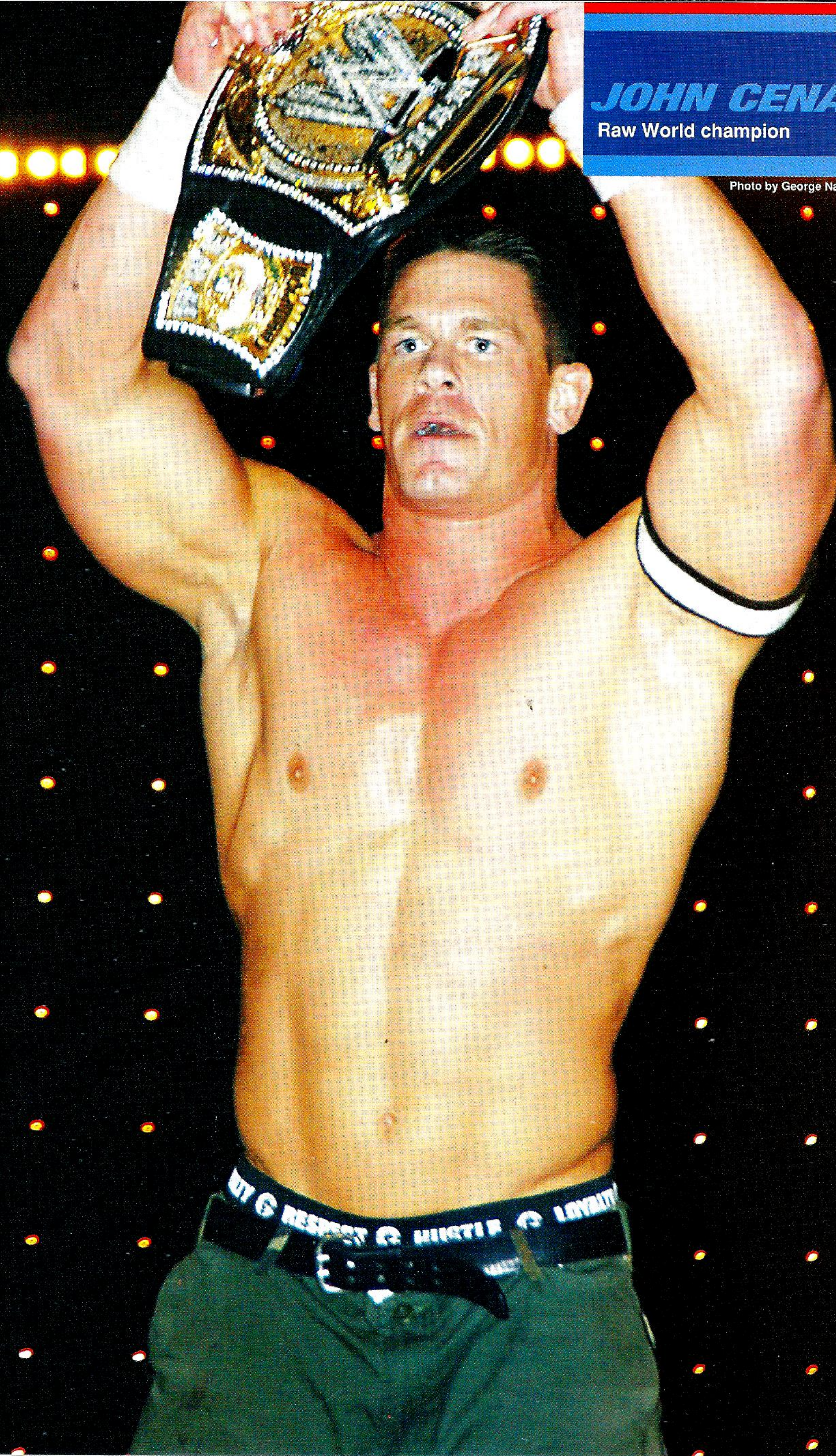
WWE U.S. CHAMPION: CHRIS BENOIT
(October 10, 2006; from Ken Kennedy; Jacksonville, FL)

WWE WOMEN'S CHAMPION: MICKIE JAMES
(November 26, 2006; from Lita; Philadelphia, PA)

JOHN CENA

Raw World champion

Photo by George Napolitano



CHRISTOPHER DANIELS

TNA X division champion

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

